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*The*  
AMIABLE CRIMES  
OF DIRK MEMLING







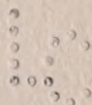
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AMIABLE CRIMES  
OF DIRK MEMLING

BY  
RUPERT HUGHES

AUTHOR OF "EXCUSE ME," "MRS. BUDLONG'S  
CHRISTMAS PRESENTS," ETC.



ILLUSTRATED



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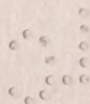


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# THE AMIABLE CRIMES OF DIRK MEMMLING

## CHAPTER I

### KIDNAPPING A MONUMENT

**A**LONE, erect, unflinching, the statue kept watch from its square pedestal on a barren mound in a bleak, blizzard-swept field. It was evidently the memorial of some soldier, for the figure leaned upon a sword, and faced the driven sleet as he must have faced the singing bullets in his great day—whenever that was, whoever he was. The ice that varnished the marble, the snow that scumbled the accouterment, and the haze of storm prevented a decision as to which of our many wars had made him.

When the limited express shot past, losing time on the squealing rails where the frosty wheels failed to grip, the lonely monument caught the eye of the two thieves lounging in the armchairs of the library car.

They were making a neat escape from an exquisite bit of technique they had just displayed in the mid-west. They were flush and content, and their last worry was the gantlet of detectives at the Grand Central Station.

One of the other passengers, who studied people's faces and played at being a phrenologist, was musing on them through his smoke rings. Like all physiogno-



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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maniacs he went wrong on essentials, but occasionally made a happy guess at unimportant details. He never dreamed that these men were professional criminals, but he set down the short one as a race-track enthusiast, the long one as an artist of some sort. And he wondered at their incongruous companionship.

The small, wiry, loudly dressed member of the firm was, indeed, one whose highest ambition was to be called a dead-game sport. But he was moved, by the plight of the statue, to a splurge of sentiment.

"Cheese, but dat moniment looks cold out dere. Glad I ain't got his job. Good t'ing fer him he's on'y marble."

The long, sinuous thief, with careless refinement in his clothes, his voice, his manner, answered dreamily:

"Don't think that he doesn't suffer just because he's marble. It always breaks my heart to see a statue out in the cold. There ought to be a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Inanimates. And that seems to be a fairly decent piece of work, too. Perhaps it's the haze and the sunset, but it has a certain something about it. Wonder who made it."

"You can soich me. Here comes de conductor. Ast him."

"Did a train conductor ever know anything about the sights along the line? But you might ask him the name of the next town, and if the train stops there."

The phrase "you might" was spoken in the tone of a kindly master to an old servant. The other man always felt it, but it amused him so much that he never resented it. He usually obeyed to save argument and to keep from being told that it was all for his own good.

As the conductor passed, he put out an ingenious right hand that might have taken the conductor's precise



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## *Kidnapping a Monument*

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watch without disturbing him; but the fingers merely detained him.

“Say, cap, where are we at, about now?”

The conductor bent to look through the window for a landmark:

“Just coming into Waupeka.”

The dreamer murmured:

“Waupeka? Isn’t that where a battle was fought during the Revolution?”

“I believe I did hear something about something of the kind.”

The dreamer lifted a hand of languid dismay at such indifferent ignorance; then he nodded to his companion, who obediently asked the prescribed question:

“Say, cap, do we stop dere?”

With all the injured pride of a rear admiral treated as a scow skipper, the conductor growled:

“Stop at Waupeka! Whattaya think this is?—a milk train?”

And he stalked on. The little fellow whined:

“You let me in fer dat one he handed me!”

The dreamer smiled. “You might run after him and say, ‘Of course, this isn’t a milk train, conductor—a milk train wouldn’t dare be three hours late and keep the cows waiting.’”

The little one stared in awe: “Cheese, I wisht I could t’ink up dem fly comebacks like you can. Why didn’ you spring it?”

“He is only a conductor. He would not have understood.”

But the conductor and his pride had a fall. Just as he reached the end of the car, the brakes were jammed so hard that he came hurtling down the aisle with all limbs



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flying. The passengers and their chairs followed him in a human avalanche to the lounge seat.

Bruised and bewildered, they picked their own legs and arms out of the huddle, and realized that the train was stopping as suddenly as if the engine had stubbed its toe. They forgot their black-and-blue spots in their gratitude at an evident escape from disaster. In the thick air, the engineer had nearly run past a signal set to protect an express in the block ahead, held up by a stalled freight just ahead of it.

Several of the passengers opened the vestibule doors and dropped to the ground, the two thieves among them. The little one looked ahead to learn the cause of the delay. The tall one turned to stare back at the statue, now just visible on the crimson horizon, fronting the dull sun like a little finger thrust into a red bubble.

The artist called the sport to one side with an important nod. "Herman," he said, and Herman knew it meant something, for when Mr. Memling was in a frivolous mood he called his light-fingered partner "Hermes," a mythological tribute both to the adeptness of his friend, and to the god of theft and other forms of commerce.

The police called Herman, "Slinky" Brown, alias Green, alias White, et cetera. But they did not call Mr. Memling at all, for they did not know him, and it was only the relaxed caution of recent triumph that led him to appear in Slinky's society on this train.

"Herman," said Mr. Memling, "I think we'll stop off here in Waupeka."

"Why'n'ell should we?"

"In the first place, I want to have a look at that statue. In the second, it would be just as well for us not to roll into the Grand Central on this train. We'll be seen,



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## *Kidnapping a Monument*

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surely, and they might connect us with our latest chef d'œuvre."

For the sake of self-respect, Slinky usually pretended to ponder before he yielded:

"As fer de moniment, it don't int'res' me; but your secon' reason does you proud."

"Thanks. Approbation from Sir Herman Stanley is approbation indeed."

Slinky wrinkled his face like a cogitating ape's, and gasped:

"What from who is what?"

"Never mind. But would you be good enough to get the suit cases?"

Slinky always obeyed, but always with bad grace to prove his equality.

"Well, of all the noive I ever hoid of—oh, all right!" And he clambered into the car and clambered out with the suit cases. He offered Memling his, but Memling said:

"I think, Herman, that you will balance better if you carry both of them."

They edged along the tie ends to the head of the train and on to the station platform some distance ahead. Most of the yeomanry were there gaping at the limited which had never honored Waupeka thus before. Memling said to a bus driver:

"I hate to tear you away, but would you take us to Waupeka's best hotel—or the least offensive one?"

The driver took them to the Stebbins House. They groaned to meet it. They had risked life and liberty for the swag they had with them, and they had dreamed of Ritz-Carltonian luxuries. But discretion counseled a further postponement of Nirvana.

It was too late to visit the statue, and the Waupekans



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did not seem worthy of craft of their quality, so, to kill a dragging evening, they went innocently to a moving picture palace.

This was the very place where Memling got the inspiration for the most elaborate of their triumphs in property transfer, the great cinematographic—but that can wait.

During the night the blizzard relented, and by the time the innocents were abroad, the sun had been at work for some hours upon the snow, and the balmy air had a lying promise of spring.

When Memling resolved to drive out to the statue, Slinky decided to go also. Even an art pilgrimage was better than being left alone in Waupeka.

Meanwhile, by questioning Mr. Stebbins, Memling had learned something of the neglected hero on the lonesome pedestal.

The statue was in memory of General Pulsifer, and General Pulsifer was an old farmer who had gathered his neighbors into a Falstaff's army, to hamper General Burgoyne when he came down to Saratoga during the wet fall of Seventeen Seventy-Seven.

The one standard of admission to the Pulsiferian legion was the ability to knock a squirrel off a rail at eighty yards. That was good shooting for a flintlock, and the grangers rarely missed a red coat as they straggled along the side lines.

Eventually a detachment of size was detailed by Burgoyne to chase the irritating mob across the horizon. General Pulsifer lured the regulars through rough stubble to the field where the statue now stood and where a forest then flourished.

There he dug some ditches during the night, and the



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## *Kidnapping a Monument*

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next morning presented the British with what they found it so hard to get out of our forefathers—a stand-up battle. The squirrel experts knocked His Majesty's men over like ninepins, and left only enough of them alive to run back and make Burgoyne feel a little more spooky in the wilderness.

By some accident during the Waupeka Waterloo, a shot aimed at somebody else by a homesick British youth, who had been forced to enlist, hit General Pulsifer in the groin, and floored him. But he crawled to his knees, and leaning against a friendly oak, held himself together with difficulty and continued in command.

This was the stout old soul to whom Waupeka had erected a well-earned statue, under the eloquence of some patriotic revivalist preaching local pride. Memling warmed to the legend so cordially that he looked forward to the statue with double favor.

After a dinner-like breakfast he and Slinky hired the article known as a "horsanbuggy" from the "livery stable" where livery had never been stabled.

As they tried in vain to annoy the nag out of a gentle jog, Slinky said:

"I wonder what de guy dat owns dis hornless ox would t'ink if he reelized he'd gave his proputtty to a coupla—well, to us. And he didn' even ast for his dollar and a half in advance."

"He probably realized that we could not get far with this snail."

"Dat's right, dey could ketch us in a canal boat. Look at him; he t'inks he's trottin' in his sleep. He acts like he'd been doped for a slow race."

But eventually even that horse got them to the statue. As Memling had glimpsed its shadowy mass from the



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train, it had seemed to have meaning and composition, and all the mysterious poetry of line and mass that gives sculpture life. But when he confronted the actual effigy he realized that it was in the worst school of American sculpture at its worst. The snow had melted, leaving its crudities naked to the critical eye. Even Herman felt the wretchedness of it.

"Looks like it was did wit' a axe," he said.

"No, Herman, no. If it had been done with an axe, it would have shown a certain breadth of handling. It looks as if it had been done with a crochet hook or the weapons of a manicure. The artist—God save the mark—has worked out the buttonholes and the braid with perfect detail; the sword and the boots are masterpieces of accuracy, but there is no life in the sword, and there are no feet in the boots. There's no soul in the body, no brains behind the eyes.

"He's got him at parade rest according to Civil War tactics, instead of—why didn't the idiot seize his opportunity? Lord, if they had given me that commission I'd have given them a Yankee classic—something racial—an old horny-faced granger, leaning against a tree, and gripping his wounded belly with one hand and waving an order with the other. Think of his face—his hard, old mouth twisted with pain, and his eyes full of the joy of Leonidas. What a pity that our American heroes have neither great poets nor great sculptors to celebrate them. Oh, it's too bad! The statue hurts me, Herman; it hurts me!"

"It hoits me, too," said Herman, "but I don't see what we're goin' to do to cure it—except to drive on."

"Do you know, Herman, that such a statue is more immoral than all the nudities of Greece? Think what a



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## *Kidnapping a Monument*

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bad educational effect it has on the poor ignorant farmers who pass by! They think it's art, and they go through life with false standards, chromo ideals, cigar-Indian æsthetics. It's awful, Herman; it's awful."

"Well, now dat we agree on dat, let's go back. The bot' of me feet is froze."

But Memling was deeply stirred.

"It seems a shame to drive off and leave it there. I've sometimes thought, Herman, that it is my duty to go about the world destroying bad statuary. Iconoclasm was once a religion, but the old bigots broke the good statues. How noble a work to purge the world of its bad art!"

"It'd be a life job, all right. But—be dat as it may, me feet is toinin' to marble, and seein' as how we can't take de old guy away in de back of de buggy, let's get t'hell out of here."

"And it's such a beautiful piece of marble, too, Herman. Think what Pheidias could have done with that!"

"Well, seein' as how you ain't Fido—supposin'—git-tap, Dobbin."

"Wait!" cried Memling, seizing the lines. "I wonder if—why, it's not impossible in the least."

"Say, you ain't t'inkin' of beginnin' dat poijury woik here, are you?"

"Why not? I should feel that it would be an atonement for any little faults we may have committed elsewhere. This region is practically deserted—not a farmhouse in sight—we could take it down and nobody would miss it."

"Well, of all de—say, are you bughouse or just plain crazy?"



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"We could sell the marble for something, too—enough, anyway, to repay us for our trouble."

This idea interested Herman.

"How much would a chunk of marble dat size set you back, if you was to buy it new?"

"Before it was mutilated into this atrocity, it was worth probably six hundred dollars. The artist probably got six thousand. He ought to have got six years."

"I know a marble-yard man dat would steal a broken column from his own mudder's grave for a profit. We might sell it to him, and he could toin it into a weeping angel by just screwin' on a coupla wings."

"Not a bad idea, Herman—for you."

"T'anks for de bokay. But, how'd we git it down? It must weigh sumpin'."

"Not more than a thousand or twelve hundred pounds."

"Is dat all? Well, just reach up and pick it off de shelf—unless you happen to have a young derrick in your inside pocket."

"Not at all necessary. Don't you remember how our forefathers pulled down the statue of King George in Bowling Green?"

"I wasn' dere at de time. But I guess dey didn't mind how he looked when he lit."

"No, they melted him up into bullets."

"Dey melted marble?—whatcha givin' us?"

"George was made of lead, Hermes!"

"Oh! Well, how you goin' to pull His Nibs off his poich wit'out crackin' him into splinters? Me friend don't want marble dust. He don't run no sody fountain; he runs a bargain shop for widders and widderers. He'd have to have dis statute all in one piece."



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## *Kidnapping a Monument*

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"Nothing simpler. We could just toss a rope round his neck and pull him over into a wagon loaded with hay."

"We can manatch de rope, all right, all right, but where you goin' to get de hay wagon?"

"I was thinking you might steal me one."

"I see—I might steal it."

"Exactly. This is a rural neighborhood. We passed a number of commodious barns on our way out. All you have to do is to go to one of them, climb into a hayloft, pitch a load down into a wagon, and bring it along."

"Oh, I just bring it along, eh?"

"Well, you might borrow a pair of horses while you're at it."

"Fine!"

"We'll go back and have dinner—or supper—at the Stebbins-Astoria, and after dark you can fetch the hay wagon. I will provide the rope and meet you here. And, Herman, you'd better arrange for a full moon."

"Sure! Anyt'ing else, your madge?"

"That will be all, I think. And now let us spin back to the garage, Herman."

When at last they neared Waupeka again they saw ahead of them a small farmhouse with a magnificent barn. The man who owned it was just driving into the stable yard a jouncing wagon drawn by a team of stout and fuzzy horses.

"That's a good-looking pair, Herman. You might take them. The old villain deserves to lose them, because he keeps his family in a hovel, and his horses in a Queen Anne mansion."

Herman answered with a coachman's salute of obedience. When they had returned their own equipage to the livery stable and paid for it, and were walking to the



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hotel, Herman stopped on the sidewalk and kicked one congealed foot with the other.

"Say, milord, what you goin' to do wit' de moniment when we get it? You can't stuff it in yer money belt. We can't take it straight to me friend."

"I had planned for all that, Herman. By nine o'clock the statue will be reposing on the hay wagon. By ten we shall be enjoying a cross-country drive in the moonlight. By daybreak we shall be driving into Wadhamsville-on-Hudson. The statue will be neatly packed in a tarpaulin, padded with hay, the rest of the hay will be left en route. We drive to the wharf and ask the man to ship this block of marble from our new quarry to New York. It will be delivered by a freight boat at a North River slip, whence it will be carted to my studio, and set up there by the genial and accommodating stevedores. I will unpack it myself, with your assistance—no, I think you had better not come to the studio for a few weeks. Nellie will help me remove the canvas and the straw. At my leisure I can alter the statue beyond identification with a few taps of my trusty chisel. It will then be safe to intrust to your friend with the marble yard. Is it all clear, Herman?"

"I guess I git you. So it's us for an all-night drive, eh? I guess I'll swipe a coupla extra overcoats I seen hangin' outside de Parisian Emporium."

"A good idea. Meanwhile, I will endeavor to purchase a roll of heavy muslin or canvas. Perhaps I can buy a small tent."

"Buy it? You always wanta buy yer own supplies, but you leave me git mine any old how."

"Naturally, Herman. Your general manner is such that if you were seen buying something, people would be suspicious of you at once. If you stole it, they'd never notice."



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## *The Partners Part*

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As for me—even if I had Nellie's shoplifter's raglan on, it would be hard to conceal a tent about my slender form without attracting the attention of even a floorwalker. But everybody knows how easy it is to purloin a team of horses and a mere wagon. It is constantly being done. Don't whine, Herman, and don't shirk."

"If I ever shoiked anyt'ing, me name's not Hoiman."

"Bravely said. Now let us hasten to the hotel before the lukewarm biscuits and apple sauce are all devoured by the rude yokels who think that General Pulsifer is a work of art. They will not appreciate our industry in their cause, Herman, but when was a philanthropist ever appreciated? Are people grateful to Carnegie when he forces good literature on them? No. And they will not be grateful to us for relieving them of a malformation in marble. But—we shall have done our duty."

"You got such a way o' provin' everyt'ing you wanta do is your dooty, dat sometimes I t'ink you got English blood in you."

"An Englishman and a sculptor at the same time? The slander is ridiculous, Herman. The Memlings are Flemish. There were great Memlings in Flanders when London was the Waupeka of Europe. But remember your promise never to dabble in art criticism, and after you have washed your hands, you may come in to supper."

## CHAPTER II

### THE PARTNERS PART

IF the farmers of Waupeka County had not practiced so consistently their precept of early-to-bed, one of them might not have lost his horses, his wagon, and his



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hay; the others might not have lost their single would-be work of art.

The farmer got back his team eventually, after Herman had delivered his heavy load at the Wadhamsville wharf, and driven out along a lonely country road, where he turned the horses loose and struck off across a neck of woods to another town.

But Waupeka County never got General Pulsifer back, even in replica, and passengers on the trains that whiz past sometimes ask the conductor what the empty pedestal means.

He never knows.

But then they never know.

During the long arctic night of the cross-country drive, Memling and Herman had decided—or at least Memling had decided, and Herman had growlingly agreed—that it would be discreeter for both of them not to be visible in New York at the same time. They had been seen together on the train; they had been seen together in Waupeka. This rashness must be paid for by an interlude of that ascetic isolation which their stern profession sometimes requires.

Memling advised, or decreed, that he would be the better one to go to New York. He could withdraw into his studio on West Tenth Street, in that region where even the policemen get lost on the crisscross streets. Herman could rusticate in some minor city.

“Oh, of course, I gotta git de woist of it,” whined Herman. “It’s me fer Reubenville, and you fer gay Manhattan.”

“Really, Herman; you are most unreasonable at times. Don’t I take all the risks? Don’t I take the statue into my very home?”





“Waupeka County never got General Pulsifer back, even  
in replica”







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## *The Partners Part*

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"Oh, all right; don't try to prove you're doin' your dam' dooty again. I'll go. But don't forgit to send me woid when I can come back."

"You shall have a telegram, Herman. And then you can come back and sell the disguised statue to your friend in the marble yard."

"And could I borry a little of our money off you to live on whilst I'm makin' a noise like a toinip?"

"I'll give you some of it, of course; but I'll keep most of it, so that you won't spend it."

"And so dat you will. Well, seein' as I took all the risk, and did all the swipin', I hope you'll be as generous as you can."

"You overlook one thing, Herman. You did, indeed, do the actual manual labor, and did it well—very well—but don't forget that I planned it. You had never heard of the place when I told you my scheme."

"Oh, all right—call it a day's woik and gimme de regular union rate for second-story woikers."

"Bear in mind, Herman, it is not that I believe in hoarding money up. Money is manufactured for circulation, not for the medallion cabinet or the portfolio of old prints."

"You don't hafta tell me; you're de woist spendt'rift on oit."

"I suppose you mean 'on earth,' Herman. If only you spoke more English and less New York!"

"I'm a New Yorker, not a Englishman—but do I git me wages?"

"Certainly. I'd give you all of your share at once, but you spend your money so ungracefully, Herman; so very ungracefully."

"And don't forgit de telegram."



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"No, Herman."

"And you might prepay it—fer once."

"I certainly will, if I happen to have the change."

The city of St. George, where Slinky elected to hibernate, was enjoying the unusual luxury of a municipal scandal, in an effort to ape metropolitan dignities. It was just such a scandal, only in smaller degree, as that magnificent embezzlement which drove Dirk Memling from the art of sculpture to the art of crime.

### CHAPTER III

#### A SAMARITAN CRIME

**M**EMPLING was meant to be a statuary of the first quality, and he might have achieved his intention if certain political pickpockets had not robbed him of his birthright, and set his hand against the world.

His fall dated from the famous scandal of the new capitol of the State of Missianichusio—that colossal steal, crowded from public memory by later shames. Memling, recently graduated from the art schools, but already distinguished by his skill and daring, had won the commission for a pediment group of twelve heroic figures. A slight advance payment sent him to Italy, where marble cutters are cheap; but the grafters on the capitol building-fund stole so much money, and were so entangled in investigations, that Memling and his life work were forgotten, abandoned—marooned in the mid-ocean of incompleteness.

He had borrowed several thousands of dollars for his heavy expenses, and had been assured of more, when abruptly the commission was recalled, and he was left



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## *A Samaritan Crime*

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with a group of unpaid assistants, a pitiful array of half-finished marbles, and a magnificent bankruptcy.

His easy-going financial ideas were not greatly disturbed by hopeless bankruptcy, but his tender heart grieved for his half-starved marble cutters, and he died a living death when he bade farewell to his statues, and locked them up in that Florentine shed, whose rent he could no longer pay.

His statues seemed to cry after him, "Don't leave us like this!" and he never forgot the finished and breathing heads hideously agonizing from the marble, the living hands thrust out from the shapeless blocks, as if a wanton god had called them from stone and suffocated them half-way out.

When he flung away from that charnel of his dreams, he took with him a broken heart and a broken soul, without a sense of obligation to the world, especially to that country of his, where the politics is marked even less by artistic ambition than by probity.

Memling had always pictured himself as coming home on some great ship with his family of marbles, and as being met at the pier by delegations. Instead, he sneaked back in the steerage of an immigrant hulk, packed like a floating sardine box.

Among all the human cargo below decks he found only one American, and him a sneak thief, though Memling did not learn this till later. Their common experience of the justice of the world, its mercy, and its general honesty, brought them together.

Memling had come aboard with little cash and few cigarettes. He endured the short rations, but the tobacco famine made him peevish.

Slinky, who had a good heart, so far as it beat, and



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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whose tears were as facile as his oaths, was dreadfully distressed at his companion's plight. One rough morning he said:

"Say, Bo, you're soitan'y in bad. You need dough. I ain't got any to lend you, but I'll git you some."

"Where?" said Memling innocently.

"Don't let dat worry you," said Slinky.

When the ship's doctor came through the steerage that day on a tour of inspection, Slinky edged up and wheezed:

"Say, doc, I gotta awful boinin' pain in me t'roat. Take a peek at it, will you?"

As Memling idly watched the ship's doctor peering down Slinky's funnel, he saw, to his horror, that Slinky's hands twitched and groped as if in protecting pain, but incidentally explored the doctor's clothes and emerged with a wallet.

The doctor growled:

"Nothing the matter with you except too many cigarettes. Cut 'em out."

As he turned away Slinky slipped the wallet to Memling, who took it mechanically as one usually takes what is put in his palm. He concealed it from lack of courage to give it back.

The doctor on his return to the first cabin missed his money, and went at once to reinspect the steerage. The Italians all looked like pirates, Black Handers, charter members of the Mafia. He accused all of them, and had them all searched. He even ordered Slinky searched. Slinky was bitterly hurt, but submitted. The doctor never dreamed of insulting the cultured Memling. Besides, Memling had not been near him.

As soon as it was safe Memling went to Slinky and



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## *Quixote and Panza*

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commanded him to restore the wallet. If he could have done it without involving Slinky he would never have hesitated to return it himself. But Slinky's intentions were pure and noble. And he looked so hurt at Memling's ingratitude that the artist felt himself a brute. Slinky's deed was Samaritan, an altruistic theft, and Memling could not stoop to the treachery of exposing him.

Also, the first lesson of honor the schools teach us is that it is despicable to tattle.

### CHAPTER IV

#### QUIXOTE AND PANZA

MEMLING did not tell on Slinky. In fact, he began to lean on him, for Slinky was a man of resource. He was like certain of the higher lower animals whom intellect never touches, but who display at times amazing ingenuity and agility.

If he could not get blood from a turnip, he could get a turnip from a blood, and then pawn the turnip. A pianist would have envied Slinky his pianissimo touch, a fox might have been jealous of his cleverness in doubling on the hounds.

The sculptor and the thief gradually settled into a sort of vague partnership, and this was soon cemented by numberless complicities in crimes from whose consequences either might have escaped by turning State's evidence.

Having arrived at his new profession from the upper air, Memling was rather snobbish, and the native of the lower air humored him in it.

Perhaps the thing that Memling liked most about



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Slinky was the very ignorance that might have seemed to render them incompatible.

"Hermes," Memling would say, "the thing I like most about you is that you don't know a blamed thing about art and you care the same. But if I ever hear you express an opinion of a painting or a statue, and it is a wrong opinion—as it's sure to be—I'll quit you cold. Some day, just for exercise, run up to Central Park and study the statues on the Mall. If you like one of them, never come back; if you can come home and look me in the eye and honestly say, 'Bo, dey're all rotten,' I'll take you to the Metropolitan Museum some Sunday and give you a sight of some real sculpture, most of it in plaster copies."

If Slinky ever went to the Mall he never confessed it. As for art exhibitions, he thought of them only as fertile ground for collecting souvenirs, as the visitors were mostly women with easily detachable pocketbooks. Memling, however, forbade him to rob visitors to an art gallery. It seemed like discouraging the very training that America needed.

But one day they dropped into a National Academy exhibition. Memling was so disgusted with the "papa-kiss-mamma" scenes, the landscapes with a quotation, the candy-box lovers, the dried-apple portraiture that make up the larger part of such an exhibition, that he turned to Slinky and said:

"Herman, you may take all the purses you can get here."

For some years they operated in partnership, and made money enough together to rent a studio—for Memling to occupy. This seemed rather unfair to Slinky, but Memling explained:

"It's all for your own good, Herman. Your past and



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## *Quixote and Panza*

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your face are among those few things that every policeman knows. You can't change either. If I could remodel you into a pale imitation of respectability I'd do it gladly, but you would baffle even a beauty doctor. Don't you see that if you come to the studio, if you are seen in public in my company, you are sure to be suspected, and I should be quarantined as one who has been exposed to infectious crime?

"A studio is an ideal place for storing the large objects that we make our specialty. Somebody has to be caretaker, and much as I hate studio life, I consent to be a mere janitor, and allow you the freedom of the city. But you must never come near the studio except after dark. You will find, Herman, that, in this matter, as always, I am sacrificing myself."

"You are, like—well, all right; leave me lay."

So the studio was rented—one of those dwellings in the art colony in West Tenth Street, where two stories have been made into one for sculpture.

The profession of sculpture, by the way, is an excellent side line for a thief, because sculptors are notoriously secretive, and frankly averse to showing their incomplete work even to friends; curious looking persons visit them as models; bundles of odd sizes and great bulk go in and out mysteriously swathed, and as their commissions are always far in the future they are not expected to have any visible means of support.

Memling's studio was closed to his table-d'hôte cronies on the plea of modesty or of caution; and nobody suspected him of being more than he confessed. When General Pulsifer, bound and gagged, was toted ignominiously into the studio, feet first, Memling went at him with a chisel. By gentle modifications of the features, and the



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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uniform, and by tooling the whole surface carefully and superficially, he accomplished what the retouchers at the photograph galleries accomplish—that is, he removed all semblance of likeness.

But having converted General Pulsifer into an ambiguous effigy, Memling was struck suddenly with the infinite possibilities of that block of marble, the infinitely various shapes it contained. And a great idea came to him.

### CHAPTER V

#### THE SCANDAL OF ST. GEORGE

MEANWHILE Slinky was trying to inure himself to the almost-metropolis of St. George. On the day of his arrival he noted with disgust that the job he and Memling had just pulled off was referred to in a scant teleparagraph, to the effect that the miscreants were in San Francisco under espionage; but a whole page was given over to the exposure of a local evil with headlines shouting a loud alarum:

#### APPALLING EXPOSURE

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SANTIAGO MONUMENT FUND  
LOOTED BY GRAFTERS

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THE GAZETTE'S GREAT SCOOP  
STATUE NEVER ERECTED

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*Why?*



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## *The Scandal of St. George*

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A new editor had come to town, it seems, and casting about for some stimulant to a torpid circulation had unearthed a sleeping sin and stirred it with a muck rake. Years before, at the close of the Spanish war, the public being at that time excited over the embalmed beef and other forgotten horrors, the people of St. George had watched the return of the regiment it had patriotically recruited and sent to the front.

The regiment, the city's pride, made up of the nicest young men in town, never got to the front; it was always in the middle rear distance. It never saw a Spaniard in arms, never fired a shot, yet when it returned from its three camping grounds, Chickamauga, Tampa, and Porto Rico, it looked as if it had been through the Moscow campaign.

The girls who used to dance with the nice young men cried their eyes out at the sight of the scarecrows that limped home; and the mothers cried harder at the non-sight of the feed-crows left behind under the sod.

Then some heartbroken father proposed the only sensible war monument ever devised, a memorial to those who never shot a shot, but died the death most soldiers die. It was taken up as the Typhoid Monument, and subscriptions poured in. The idea was so popular that the party in power made a municipal issue of it, voted a large sum of money to cap the subscriptions, and took charge of the fund—some twenty-five thousand dollars in all.

And then the usual happened. Emotion having been exhaled, evaporated. People debated details of the monument till they tired of the subject. Some new horror fascinated the public. Even their own families got used to not seeing the dead men about. The fund was forgotten.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Now, the Republicrats had run the city of St. George to their own liking for years. The Democans began to raise their heads. The Republicratic bosses, finding their funds low, borrowed from the monument fund, as one loots the baby's savings bank when change is needed. Such borrowings, always taken with the best intentions, are never returned. The baby cannot count, and the bank cannot talk.

So the Typhoid Monument fund grew smaller by degrees and beautifully less till a hard-pressed alderman cleaned it out completely. Nobody was the wiser. Then that new editor from out of town began to snoop into other people's business for the good of his own.

He prepared his bombshell in secret and exploded it all over his front page one fine morning. It sent a tidal wave across every coffee cup in town, and on the breakfast tables of the Republicratic leaders, the soft-boiled eggs were putrified with astonishment. Such telephoning, such scurrying to backstair conferences, such consternation at the fact that incessant take-outs without even occasional put-ins had worn the twenty-five thousand dollars down to the decimal point.

All the leaders said: "This is outrageous, and for the good of the party I would gladly dig down into my jeans—at any other time. Just now I'm particularly short of cash."

They all said that, and it was true. The Democan outsiders raised a yell of glee and prepared to lynch the inside rascals politically. The district attorney felt that he could save himself only by sliding several of his makers into the penitentiary.

So devastated and dismayed were the political bosses that the only answer they could make to the newspaper



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## *The Scandal of St. George*

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charge was a lofty refusal to "dignify with denial" an "odious slander" against the "fair name" of St. George.

The new editor came back with larger headlines, and they called him a sensation-monger, a yellow journalist, a prevaricator worthy of "the shorter, uglier word."

This was the day that Slinky struck town. As he read of the deed of the city stepfathers, he felt all the repugnance that one thief feels for another.

The next day the charge was repeated, and the question reiterated: "Why was the statue never erected? Echo answers, Why?"

And that day a great idea came to Slinky.

He read the latest combings from the muck rake and noted that the head and front of the offending politicians was the uncrowned king, Boss Pedrick. At least he was chosen to bear the brunt of the attack.

Slinky called upon Boss Pedrick and requested an interview. He was accused of being a reporter, but he denied it with such honest indignation that he was admitted.

Boss Pedrick, hitherto notorious for his gruff manner, sat idly at his desk, collapsed upon himself like an over-ripe tomato. His haughtiness had given way to the pitiful meekness of a bank president greeting a depositor during a panic.

When he saw Slinky slither up to his desk he had just enough presence of mind to button his coat over his watch, set the silver inkstand on the far corner, and feel for his cravat pin. Slinky acknowledged the tribute with a delicate sarcasm. "Don't worry; I never do nothin' to me own profession."

Pedrick flushed and snorted: "Well, what do you want? I'm a busy man!"



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Slinky swept a flashlight look about the room, hitched up his chair, as if he were going to pocket it, and lowered his voice:

"Boss, I see by de papers you're up against it, and you got a heavy boiden on yer shoulders."

"Get to it!" said Pedrick.

Slinky rose. "Well, o' course, if I'm keepin' you up, I'll move on, as the sayin' is. I seen a way of helpin' a feller sufferer out o' trouble, and it looked so poifickly simple I t'ought I'd put you wise, but I don't want to bodder a busy man."

"Sit down, and spit it out. What's the idea?"

"Look here, boss. I'm a gent'man and I'm useta bein' treated as such."

"Have a cigar and let's hear what you've got up your sleeve."

"T'anks. Nemmine, I got a match. Well, here's de situation as I dope it out. You folks have gotta cough twenty-fi' thou' or perduce the statue. You can't do needer on short notice. I happen to know a gent'man who's got a statue layin' idle. He could touch it up a bit, trim de whiskers, change de knickerbockers into khaki pants, and presto-change-o, you got a Spanish war vet'run before you know it.

"Me fren' is a blue-ribbon sculptor, and you could say he's been workin' on de statue for two years in Italy. He's been dere and he could carry out de bluff. You could say you'd been meanin' to surprise de merry villagers, and had intended to postpone de unveilin' till de Fourt' o' next July, but seein' as a soितain slimy party from out o' town has cast aspoisions on your sacred honor, and de fair name of St. Chorch—and so on, you will erect de monument at once. By de time you got de pedestal set up de statue will be in de freight yard."



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## *The Scandal of St. George*

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The inside of Boss Pedrick's head was like a choir loft full of hosannas, but his front was as grave as ever. All he said was:

"You haven't got a pedestal handy, have you?"

"No, we ain't, and it's too bad. While we was at it we might as well have—no, we ain't got no pedestal. But I could git you one cheap from a friend o' mine what runs a marble yard."

Boss Pedrick was a man of few words. From the corner of his mouth not occupied by his gigantic cigar, he merely ejected:

"You're on."

There was some haggling over the price to be paid, and he gradually brought Slinky—who had a poor head for business—from the clouds to a flat one thousand dollars. Slinky managed to secure a promise of five hundred dollars in advance, and the Boss dismissed him for an hour, while he called up his co-criminals and told them what he had decided for them, and how much assessment each would have to pay.

"We save twenty-four thousand dollars and our bacon, so walk up to the desk and cough."

That night the oligarchy that ruled St. George had the first good sleep since the new editor began his campaign for circulation, alias reformation. And Slinky was on a sleeping car, bound for New York, without waiting for a telegram. He had five hundred dollars, and as he lay awake all night to guard it he realized and resented the inconvenience to which property holders are put by the dishonest.

So excited was Slinky over his great coup that he marched up to the house in broad daylight, and when the old negro cook came to the door he walked round her as if he owned the place. He hurried straight to the studio, but



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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paused with hand uplifted to knock, for he heard from within the click and clatter of a chisel upon marble—a pleasant enough sound, as a rule, but one that gave Slinky a premonitory chill.

### CHAPTER VI

#### THE GENERAL BECOMES A NYMPH

**S**LINKY tapped with aspen fingers, and Memling, in a blouse and with marble dust prematurely whitening his hair, opened the door, looked surprised, held the door slightly ajar, and called over his shoulder:

“Oh, Nellie!—Herman is here. You might put on that portière till I see what he wants. Ready? Come in, Herman. To what do we owe the honor of this visit?”

Slinky wedged through the chink without a word, and his eyes search-lighted the huge two-storied room for the purloined statue. It was not to be seen. The only visible marble was a something about life size, which was evidently the beginning of a “Wenus.”

“What do you think of her?” said Memling.

“It’s a little oily for me to say,” said Slinky, side-stepping art criticism. “But where’s old General Pulsifer?”

“This is he—or she?”

“Dat?”

“That.”

“Well, I’ll be—do you meanta—why, what t’——”

“Exactly. You see, Herman, the day after you left town for the city of—I mislaid the address.”

“He mislaid the address!” whispered Slinky.

“That day I studied General Pulsifer closely, and I



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## *The General Becomes a Nymph*

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discovered that he was but the crude disguise of the most beautiful beauty that was ever turned to stone. I have been releasing her, Herman, and Nellie has been kind enough to pose as a guide. I call her a dryad. Do you know what a dryad is?"

Slinky did not know and did not care. What he wanted to know was why in—but Memling was rambling on:

"Somebody has well said that sculpture is the easiest of the arts, since all you have to do is to take a block of marble and knock off what you don't want. That is what I have been doing, simply shelling, as it were, the dryad. She will make me famous after I am dead."

Slinky was thinking of making him dead on the spot. He hesitated between apoplexy and murder. In a faint, strangled tone, he rasped:

"So whilst I was layin' out in de tall grass you done me doit like dis!"

"Gently, Herman; there are ladies present. Don't forget yourself—or me. When this is finished I shall sell it for far more than the paltry sum your marble-yard friend would have paid for a damaged block."

Slinky passed from throttling rage, via womanish tears, to helpless collapse. Then he poured out his own story. Memling complimented him on his inspiration, and expressed his regret at its unavailability—but it was a shallow editorial regret. He was so rapt with the joy of a return of his old creative fervor that the dilemma of the St. George bosses made no impression on his pity.

"Let the ward heelers heel themselves," he sneered. "You can return them the money and explain."

"Retoin de money!" gasped Slinky, to whom the idea



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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of returning somebody's else money was inconceivable. "Not on your bloomin' dryad. I'll write and explain dat I can't deliver de goods, and dat I'll keep de money for expenses. I'll add a P. S., 'Boin dis letter.' "

He did, and they "boined" the letter. Mr. Pedrick was so ashamed of himself for playing the bit biter that he never even answered it. For one reason, Slinky had neglected to enclose his address. For another, Mr. Pedrick felt that his suggestion was well worth the price. And some other penurious sculptor furnished the statue that now tops the Typhoid Monument. Pedrick is still King of St. George, and the new editor has been taken into camp by enough extra city advertising to make up for the circulation that fell off as soon as Pedrick appeased the citizens along the lines of Slinky's suggestion.

But the treachery of Memling smouldered in Slinky's soul, and the idea of wasting time on a mere statue to be vended in the open market did not appeal to his ideas of trade.

While he brooded Memling's chisel flew, now splitting off some fragment that thumped the floor; now merely whispering over the surface, almost invisibly qualifying some curve or plane, till the marble seemed turned to velvet, and so human that it would surely dimple under the touch of a finger.

Those were days of ecstasy for Memling—his thoughts were as pure as Canova's, as high as Michelangelo's, as serene as Praxiteles'.

When at last the Dryad was finished he stood off and mused upon it like an exultant creator.

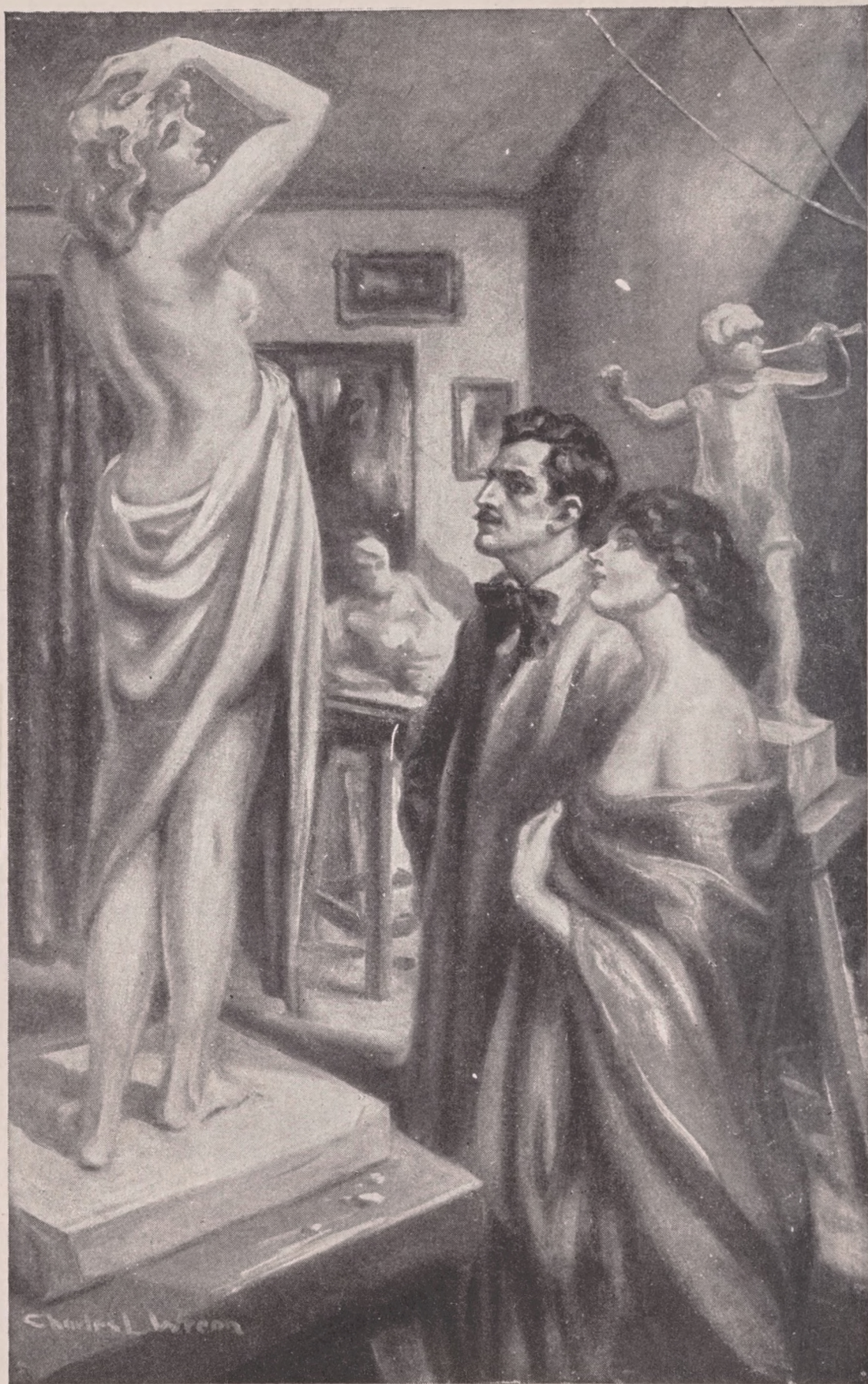
"Oh, you beauty, you beauty!" he cried, with an insane light in his eyes.

Nellie, who had stood model for it till she ached;









“ ‘I’m so glad you like me’ ”



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## *The General Becomes a Nymph*

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Nellie, who was a thief at heart, and a goddess in body, tiptoed up, and murmured over his shoulder:

"I'm so glad you like me."

"You!" snapped Memling, brutal at being dragged from the clouds. "You!—what have you got to do with it? You were only the model."

It was cruel, but great artists must not be wakened too suddenly. It is like snapping the pinion of an aëroplane in full flight.

When Nellie wept Memling apologized, but absent-mindedly, absent-heartedly.

His turn for rebuff and humiliation came when he tried to sell his divine achievement. Few of the art dealers would even visit his studio, the others said: "Very nice, but there's no market whatever for classics by Americans."

There was consolation for Memling in that he kept his Galatea at home where her greatest admirer could adore her. And she was adorable, with her slim, white perfections; her exquisite poise; the eyes that did not seem to be blank, but to be drenched with tender meditation; the lips that did not seem to be white, cold, and hard, but warm, amorously tremulous.

Now all this while the funds of the company were floating off into smoke. Slinky found Memling so uselessly dreamy, so tottering on the verge of a backslide into sculpture and honesty, that he felt called upon to take the matter in hand himself.

Through some of those subterranean channels of information by which the underworld keeps together, Slinky got in touch with a man who had the same tendencies as he, but had chosen the crooked art branch instead of the quicker and more daring methods of the burglar and the



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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confidence operator. Instead of gold bricks and green goods he sold fresh-made, smoke-cured canvases under the aliases of old masters, and Greek or Italian antiques whose marble was quarried in America, or whose bronze was cast in New Jersey and sicklied over with a forged patina.

Slinky explained the situation to this man, Max Strubel, by name, and Max Strubel explained the method by which such things were manipulated. He said that it was all up to the statue, so Slinky brought him to the statue. Strubel found it "very classy, all to the custard, exactly the goods."

Memling, thinking him a dealer in good faith, flushed with joy at finding an art merchant with brains. But he almost fainted when Strubel said:

"All ve gotta do is to bury it under a barn for a few mont's."

"Bury it under a barn!" Memling echoed.

"Yes, ve find dat ammonia is the best stain, and it don't vash owit."

Instantly Memling understood. He was overswept with the shame of a father declared incompetent, unworthy to keep his own young. Memling's only child was to be carried off, adopted by some one else, given another name, and kept in ignorance of her true parentage. His other children had been still-born, had died in fetal suffocation. And now his one full-grown child, the daughter of his soul, was to be deported and sold to ignominy, to shame, to white slavery.

His whole being revolted. He seized a mallet, and whirled on the visitor.

"Get out of here, you unspeakable Iscariot, before I crack your ugly skull!"



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## *The Sacrifice*

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Strubel was petrified into a momentary statue of amazement, then he fled with unsuspected speed.

"And now, Slinky, what have you got to say?" Memling thundered, the mallet ready to perform upon Slinky's scone. Slinky had nothing to say. Then, the battle over, Memling fainted at the feet of his Dryad, who smiled down upon him with motionless tenderness.

### CHAPTER VII

#### THE SACRIFICE

**W**HEN Slinky had rolled and hoisted the long form of Memling to a couch he resuscitated him into a high fever.

Nellie, who tried to nurse him, and Slinky, who spelled her, blamed it to an emotional crisis, but when they were forced to call in a doctor, he said that it was germs from bad water or improper food. Slinky blamed it to Waupeka, and wondered if the Pulsifer marble would have to serve as a typhoid monument, after all.

But Memling came through the fever, and, largely owing to his inability to obtain food, suffered no relapse, but drifted into convalescence, and grew stronger day by day, until Slinky, who grew weaker every day from privation, felt him strong enough to be told the truth.

So much money had been poured out for medicines, for alcohol hideously wasted on external applications, for the appalling salary of a trained nurse, and the high-priced broths and delicacies prescribed by the high-priced doctor, that the till was emptied completely. More money must be earned at once.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Slinky had had a jolt the last time he was abroad, from the cheerful hail of a police detective who advised him to keep out of that district. He was afraid to make any attempts upon the timepieces of men or the vanity boxes of women. Memling was too weak to invent any of his great schemes. He just lay on a couch and grew fat of body and head as he stared at the Dryad, who answered always with the same cooing smile.

Slinky looked at her angrily and meaningly, and she smiled just the same at him. Memling saw his look and got his meaning. They thought the same thing for a long while; then Memling heaved a sigh of world-weary despair, and said:

“Go on; tell Strubel I’ll apologize, if he’ll come back.”

When Strubel came he assured Mr. Memling that he cherished no ill feelinks, it was all a metter of business. He sat on the edge of Memling’s couch with unpleasantly disturbing effects, but Memling did not kick him as he wanted to. Mr. Strubel outlined his scheme.

When the statue was ready affidavits would be ready for Mr. Strubel’s most reliable affidavitters. These would, being duly sworn, depose that the statue had been excavated from a bricked-up vault in Italy, and pronounced by experts—two or three Italian affidavitters—a genuine sculpture of the best Greek period, probably of the school of Lysippus. It had evidently been brought to Italy by some of the Roman emperors, and hidden in the ground in expectation of one of the barbaric invasions. The barbarians came to stay, and the owners perished.

There would be another string of affidavits showing that the statue had been shipped out of Italy in a coffin as a dead body to evade the law against the exportation



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## *The Sacrifice*

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of antiques. The name of the port, and the bribed inspector, would be omitted "for evident reasons."

The statue would appear in a storage warehouse in New York, and thither Mr. Strubel would bring such millionaires as he knew to be eager for ready-made treasures.

"It's perfectly simble," Mr. Strubel concluded. "It's done every day. All ve neet is to give de stettue de mel-low stain of time. And I know a goot barn to put it under vile ve get de affidavits from my glients in Iddaly."

Memling had braced himself for the surrender, and he stood it all, down to the recurrence of the barn burial. The horror of this was so swift that he fainted again.

When they brought him back he was maundering:

"I can't stand it! She is so beautiful; so pure! I have no right to! It is profanation! I'd rather die!"

Slinky was weeping for his incomprehensible friend, and even Mr. Strubel was moved to compassion:

"Don't make yourself sig. Ve got anudder vay out of it," he said. "Soag ut in de varm blut of a lamp."

"Blut of a lamp," Memling echoed, and turned to Slinky. "Is he? Or am I?"

"Put it in English, Strubel, if you can," said Slinky.

"I did it. 'Blut'—don'd you know vat it iss?—blut? And a lamp is a liddle younk—vat you call it?—vool grows on it and it goes baa-baa!"

Slinky and Memling nodded their understanding. And so it was done. There was something about this new idea that pleased Memling; it gave the fraud an air of ritual solemnity.

It took some days to get a live lamb into New York and into the studio, and Nellie, when she heard what was to be done, cried and protested so bitterly that Slinky locked her in the cellar.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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The snowy form of the Dryad was lowered carefully, till she rested on one elbow, still cooing inaudibly. The struggling lamb was dragged forward by Slinky. Strubel, robed in a sheet, wielded the Levitic knife.

Suddenly the lamb's terror was over, the bleating stopped short, and the marble was flooded with warm red.

Memling was too weak of body and soul to help in the rite, and he turned his face to the wall as Strubel and Slinky varnished the statue with the thickening stain.

The ceremonial idea had appealed to him, but the cruelty and the commercialism nauseated him, and Slinky shipped him out of town for a few days—on money advanced by Strubel. When he came back the Dryad's pedestal was empty.

The place was like a cage with the bird flown, a home whence the only child has gone out into the world.

Strubel invited Memling to visit the storage warehouse surreptitiously, but he could not endure the thought. He was hardened and aged and chilled by the experience, and when Strubel's meager advances were exhausted, and he experienced some delay in finding a millionaire to bolt with his bait, Memling joined Slinky in a new series of raids on private property.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A CHILD RECLAIMED

**L** EAN years and fat years, easy escapes and narrow, occupied the firm of Dirk Memling and Slinky—whatever his name was that season. Strubel had sold the statue, but—so he said—for only a “zonk,” and he protested that he lost money by the whole transaction.



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## *A Child Reclaimed*

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"He's holdin' out on us, o' course," said Slinky, "but what kin we do? He won't even tell us de name of de guy he stuck wit' de statue."

"The guy you speak of," said Memling, with ominous calm, "got a great work of art. It would have made me immortal if I hadn't been a coward and a beast. I've disowned my own child. I'm worse than Benvenuto Cellini or Villon."

"I don't know eeder of de parties, but you can rest easy on one point. Nobody else is gettin' de credit for it. It's one of dem synonymous woiks."

This was cold comfort, yet a crumb.

It was impossible for Memling and Slinky to honor every city with a specimen of their occult powers, and among the neglected centers was one that ought to have tempted them long before. Slinky said one day:

"Why is it we ain't ever been to Pittsboig? Dey say dey got so many millionaires dere dat dey got 'em drivin' trolleys wit' gold controllers and diamond lamps."

So they went to Pittsburgh, and, after studying the town thoroughly, selected a gilded residence district as their parish. They operated a series of such successes that they found their prowess headlined in all the papers. This overjoyed Slinky, but Memling was for leaving well enough alone.

Slinky pleaded: "One more prize boiglary just to show up de cops, and I'm wit' you."

Memling consented, and they chose the showiest mansion of all as a proof of skill. Burglar alarms troubled them no whit, and they found themselves in gloomy caverns, which their electric flashes showed to be salons of overladen gorgeousness. Memling put his lips to Slinky's ear and whispered:



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"I'm afraid there's nothing here worth taking."

Slinky whispered back:

"Are you plumb nutty? It's all solid gold."

"Yes," whispered Memling, "but in such bad taste!"

They loaded a sack with sundry valuables, including a few trinkets from the curio cabinet which Memling felt to be too good to leave with their unconscious host.

They next slipped along a velvet-rugged corridor, and entered a room with a glass roof, where the moonlight was dozing heavily. There was a fountain in the middle of the room—a silent fountain, in whose basin a goldfish flicked the surface, streaking it with silver, and sending out a little tinkling spray of pearls.

Over the fountain stood a dim figure, a marble with the dull of centuries upon its moon-blued surface, and the spirit of Greece in the dreamy contentedness of every sinuous line and flexure.

Memling dug his nails into Slinky's arm and dragged him forward. They stared at the figure with remembering awe. And it smiled cooingly at them—the same smile.

Slinky whispered. "Don't dat beat"—but Memling did not hear him. Memling had dropped to his knees, his appealing arms embracing the exquisite knees of his statue in a Grecian appeal for pardon.

"Forgive me, my child! Forgive me, my child!" he murmured, till Slinky checked him with a frightened clutch.

He dragged Memling to his feet, and whispered:

"We'd better beat it while de beatin's good."

They slunk to the door again to retrace their path to the retreat they had prepared. Memling paused for one last look. Then he checked the timorous Slinky and whispered:



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## *"Why Don't We?"*

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"Lend me the jimmy a minute."

He took the steel wedge, and stole back to the Dryad's feet, and on the base of the marble, his marble, scratched with the edge of the jimmy the letters, "D. M."

He breathed deeper, as if he had legitimatized and reclaimed his child. Then he bent and touched his lips to the perfect insteps, and backed away from the altar of sacrifice.

The owner of that house knew next morning that his palace had been looted. But it was months later before his daughter said:

"Look at these letters on the base of this statue. 'D. M.' What do they mean? How did they get there?"

"I can't imagine, but the man who would mar an ancient masterpiece like that ought to be—agh, there's no punishment mean enough for the vandal!"

## CHAPTER IX

### "WHY DON'T WE?"

THE sculptor never ceased to brood over the loss of his marble child. One day he aired his grudge against fate to Slinky—even to Slinky.

"It's bad enough to have my masterwork masquerading as an ancient Greek, but it's worse to have it hidden in a private gallery—the art cellar of a low-browed millionaire."

Slinky was unsympathetic. "Cheese, but youse artist guys is hard to please. You got your price for it, didden' you?"

"Indeed I didn't!" Memling stormed. "The money is



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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the smallest part of the pay of a creator. Publicity is the chief wages. A genius may live on his money but he lives for his public. I made that statue for the millions, not for the millionaires. But the first thing a man does when he strikes it rich is to rush out, buy up a lot of great art works and put them in cold storage. Just look at the Van Veen place in Ucayga."

"I can't see as fur as Ucayga," Slinky smiled.

"It's all here in black and white," said Memling, and tossed into his lap a large magazine devoted to domestic architecture, one of those plausible magazines that tell you how to build a palace for nothing or thereabouts. The Van Veen place was one of the show homes of the country, and it was here described and pictured in minute detail.

Slinky glanced at the illustrations and floor plans with an indifferent eye. Suddenly he brightened with excitement. He leaned over and nudged Memling with the magazine.

"Pipe dose pitchers, Bo!" he gasped. "Just made to order for us poor boiglars. Every door and winder and staircase marked on a map. Dis saves you de trouble of feelin' your way in de dark, or floitin' with a chambermaid. I'll have to subscribe to dis sheet."

"I never thought of that," said Memling. But as he glanced over the magazine he was more touched by the photographs of some of the works of art than by the floor plans.

"Think of those little terra-cotta statuettes from ancient Tanagra blushing unseen in a Ucayga mausoleum. They might as well be five fathoms deep in the unfathomed caves of the ocean. Think of those marvelous can-



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## *"Why Don't We?"*

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vases of Terburg and Van Mieris asleep in shuttered rooms! Think of that bronze head found in the Ægean Sea hidden away where nobody can thrill with it!"

"It is fierce. Got a match?" said Slinky indifferently.

Memling ignored the request as he glowed with artistic rage: "Somebody ought to take them away from him, Herman. It's a public duty."

Slinky shot a quick look his way. When Memling began to talk about duty, Slinky knew that crime was brewing in that strange mind.

Memling fretted: "He's got an original bas-relief by Jean Goujon up there. I've never seen it, Herman, and I'd like to. I have a right to. I really ought to. By the Lord Harry, I'm going to!"

"Got a match?" Slinky pleaded, pining for tobacco. Memling handed him a light, with an absent sigh. The fumes cheered Slinky enough to lead him to suggest ironically: "Maybe if you was to drop old Roger Van Veen a line he'd give you a permit to see your John Goo John."

"I don't know him, in the first place. In the second place, it would be selfish just for me to go there alone. Other people have a right to see those things, too. Old Van Veen has no right to suppress masterpieces. Somebody ought to take 'em away from him—just to teach these art misers a lesson. I'd like nothing better than to take them away from him myself—all of them. I've half a mind to go up there and strip the whole place bare of everything worth while in it."

Slinky smiled at the idea: "I guess de udder half of your mind would tell you you'd need more baggage wag-  
ons dan Barnum's soikus."



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"Yes, it would be a labor of Hercules," said Memling, "but well worth while—well worth while. It would be a fitting rebuke to Van Veen's greed, a service to the public. First he shuts up the works of art, then he shuts up the house for half the year. It's a crime."

Slinky knew whither all this trended, and he grinned: "Seein' you feel like dat, I can on'y repeat de woids of de feller dat de Jew was tellin' how much insurance he carried on his store: 'I got five t'ousand insurance,' he says, 'on a stock dat ain't worth one t'ousand,' and de feller says, 'Vell, vy don't you?' he says."

"That's right," said Memling. "Why don't we?"

"Nuttin' easier," said Slinky. "Dis magazine was sent to us straight from heaven."

Memling and Slinky began to study the various pictures, as military men study war maps. They worked out imaginary campaigns against it, played a sort of Kriegspiel with the illustrations, until all the entrances and exits were as familiar to them as San Francisco harbor is to the Japanese.

The attack on the Van Veen place, however, must be in the nature of a siege. No mere burglary would suffice, and Memling cudgeled his brain for a scheme. At length it came to him and he issued a mysterious underground call to arms. It would need a small cohort of burglars to carry out his strategy.



## CHAPTER X

### “GOLD-TOOTH” AND “SHORT-ARM”

NIGHT had come on early and ugly; the wind fairly raided the town with the howling ferocity of a pack of drunken Huns. The rain went down the streets in clattering volleys of thin, long arrows, barbed with chill.

Everybody who had to be abroad in such ribald weather behaved like a hunted criminal, cowering in any shelter, sneaking along walls, making furtive dashes around stoops and across open spaces. Even if the policeman had been on the alert he would have suspected no man's manner in that turmoil.

Certainly, no one took account of the number or quality of those who crept into the doorway of the building in West Tenth Street, where Dirk Memling played sculptor when he was not busy at thievery.

Though Memling was holding the reception, the guests were all strangers to him. At Memling's behest, Slinky had gone out into the highways, byways, and slyways to gather them in. Every man jack of them had done time, or had deserved it.

The host was the last to arrive, and when he cast eyes upon the living caricatures, the congress of horrible examples, he gasped:

“Great Scott! It looks like a scene in the Brocken!”

“What's that about Brooklyn?” Short-arm Clary whispered to Slinky.

“Don't mind him,” said Slinky. “He's always shootin' off dem collidge woids. It looks to me more like one of



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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dem morning round-ups dey used to have at headquarters when dey run de night's grist past de detectives."

Short-arm winced at the memory.

The sculptor glanced at his guests again. He was a priest of the beautiful, but its extreme opposite also fascinated him, and he preferred a splendid ugliness to a doll-faced perfection. Here were predestined rogues whose very features seemed to condemn them—or to excuse them, as the point of view might be. Those who were not branded with the mark of Cain in a simian forehead or a prognathous jaw or a bestial ear, were betrayed by the habit of evil expressions caught from the habit of evil thoughts.

To Memling the convention looked like a group of wax figures from a chamber of horrors come to life. The prison pallor of many of them emphasized the kinship.

Slinky presented the guests to the host in a gesture that made one invoice of the lot:

"Gents, dis is Mr. Memling; Mr. Memling, dese is de gents we spoke of. I can guarantee every one of 'em as a perfessional. Dey ain't a yellow streak or a squealer in de bunch—and no amachoors."

The guests acknowledged the tribute and the introduction with various shufflings and duckings and coughs. Memling said:

"You honor my poor studio, gentlemen, with your society. My only regret is that poor Lombroso could not be here to meet you and see all his theories confirmed."

Short-arm turned again to Slinky:

"Who is dat Lombroso guy? Is he one of us?"

"Never hoid of him. Sounds like he was a wop."

"Prob'ly a Black Hander," said Short-arm, indignant at being classed out of his category.





Joseph  
Cummings  
Chase







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## *"Gold-Tooth" and "Short-Arm"*

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Earlier in the evening Memling had been at some pains to remove from the studio everything he thought his guests capable of removing for him, but he had not felt it necessary to take away certain plaster casts and clay beginnings. Of all imaginable things, these seemed to be the least likely to tempt the most ardent thief.

He was amused to see that one of the guests, known to infamy as "Gold-tooth" Leshner, was examining an oiled clay sketch for a life-sized bust. But Memling's smile vanished when he saw the fellow inquisitively jab a crooked finger into the yielding surface, leaving a gaping crevice that could not possibly be called a dimple. Then he drew his thumb nail, like a plane, along the exquisite contour of the throat.

Memling was turned into a statue of horror. But Gold-tooth laughed, or, rather, hissed—for he had won his name from the lone and gleaming monument that stood for many an absent tooth; and his articulation was so affected that he always spoke as if he were drunk, though he was not—always.

Like a huge and teething infant with a new toy, he giggled over the dented and grooved clay:

"Shay, Shlinky, dat shtuff's shoft, ain't it?"

Memling came to life, now, and leaped at the wretch, flung him aside with a wrathful growl:

"Keep your dirty hands off that!"

Gold-tooth looked as if he might burst into sobs.

"Why, I didn't mean no harm, mishter; I didn't doity it none. It'sh mud, anyway, and I jush wanted to shee if it was shoft, zash all."

But humility did not mend the outraged shape, and Memling roared:

"I'll find out how 'shoft' your skull is if you touch



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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that again. I worked four days on that throat, and now look at it!"

Slinky interposed: "Don't mind him, Mr. Memling; it's de foist time he was ever in a studio."

Gold-tooth had endured Memling's ferocity, for he was used to being jostled about by the police, but he could not tolerate Slinky's patronage. He was furious.

"Zash a black shlander! Zish is not de foisht shtoodo I wash ever in. Don't you shpozhe I ever had me photograph took?"

Slinky grinned. "Oh, I wasn't t'inkin' of de studio where dey mugged you fer de Rogues' Gallery. I was speakin' of real studios."

"Ah, and I've been in udder shtoodos beshide."

Slinky grinned again. "Oh, yes, I remember." He turned to Memling with a snicker. "He got so toisty once he busted into a dark room and drank every bottle in de place dry. It would have killed a human bein', but Gold-tooth is lined with tiling, like a bat'room. He on'y developed the biggest jag you ever saw. He was so full of pyro and hypo dat he ought to 'a' been framed."

Gold-tooth sizzled with pride. "Zash right. I broke two shoushand negativesh before I got out troo de shky-light. But I wash shinking of anudder big, immensh shtoodo I cleaned out where dey make dem movin' pick-shersh."

At this remark Memling, who had been playing the beauty doctor and diligently repairing the wounds of the clay bust, turned sharply and demanded:

"You say you cleaned out a moving picture studio?"

"Yesshir," said Gold-tooth, trying to look modest. "Didn't you never read about it?"

"I must confess my ignorance," said Memling.



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## *“Gold-Tooth” and “Short-Arm”*

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Gold-tooth looked at him rather with pity than scorn.

“Don’t you take de *Poleesh Gazoot*? Dey gimme a bully write-up.”

Memling bowed humbly. “I must have missed that number in the barber shop.”

“He don’t git to the shearin’ bench any too often,” Slinky explained, with a glance at the sculptor’s hyacinthine curls.

Memling never permitted a familiarity from Slinky. He shriveled him with a glance, as he coldly inquired of Gold-tooth:

“Did they capture you?”

“Capsher me?” Gold-tooth gasped. “Capsher me? For zhat! Why, de bulls never capsher anybody unlesh he bumpsh into ’em on his getaway. Everybody admitted dat I pulled off de neatesht job of dat sheashon.”

Memling regarded him with new respect: “You’re the very man I want to see. I’m going to give you another chance to distinguish yourself.”

“Do you want me to clean out anudder movin’ picksher shtoodo?”

“Better than that. Sit down, won’t you, and I’ll explain.”

Gold-tooth, simply oozing distinction, sat down, and then sat up like an indulgent monarch. But jealousy is the curse of all professionals, and even thieves are belittled by it. The deference Gold-tooth received from the swell guy who was giving the blowout aroused the resentment of Short-arm Clary. He bristled and sniffed:

“Say, boss, don’t listen to his spiel. Dat guy don’t know no more about de movin’-picture game dan a cat knows of mattymatics.”

“Do you?”



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"Do I?" Short-arm echoed. "Usedn't I to woik in one of de factories?"

"Bravo!" cried Memling. "Take a chair—take the whole divan! How long did you work there?"

"Six weeks."

"And you left them because—because——"

Slinky explained: "Because dey got in de habit of missin' t'ings from the till."

"Oh!" said Memling. "I beg your pardon."

"Don't mensh," said Short-arm politely.

"This is better than I dreamed," Memling purred. "I prayed Heaven to send me some one who knew something about this subject, and it sent me you two gentlemen."

Short-arm would not be grouped with Gold-tooth.

"Don't bunch me wit' dat guy," he said. "He don't know a rheostat from a re-wind."

"I do sho!" roared Gold-tooth.

"Well, what's the diff?" Short-arm demanded.

"Zash my bishnessh," Gold-tooth growled evasively.

Short-arm smiled with triumph, and said: "What's the idea, mister? Are you going to clear out a moving-picture plant?"

"Yes, and no," said Memling.

"You couldn't get much for dat junk," Short-arm said.

But Memling explained: "Please understand once for all that I never steal—any more than I make statues—merely for money. Nobody who devotes his art to base commercial ends exclusively ever succeeds largely. I am afraid that one of us will have to rob a moving-picture factory, because I need some of its equipment, and I have found, on investigation, that it is costly to buy, and expensive to rent.



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## *"Gold-Tooth" and "Short-Arm"*

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"Of course, if we have bad luck in borrowing these things without a cash deposit, we could lease some vacant tailor shop, and add another to the million or more ten-cent palaces; but I shudder at the harm we should do to the public intelligence—if there is any such thing."

The guests were blinking at all these indigestible phrases, but Memling flowed on:

"Getting the equipment is only the beginning of my campaign. I have in mind a masterpiece of appropriation that should go down into history as one of the noblest burglaries on record. It deserves rather the glorious name of pillage than the homely term of burglary. The idea came to me when Herman and I were temporarily sojourning in Waupeka, New York—a city from which we removed an inartistic statue for the good of the people. You remember Waupeka, no doubt, Herman."

Slinky shuddered at the reminder.

"Could anybody who ever spent a night in dat jay-bird's nest ever forget Waupeka? Every day is Sunday dere, and Sunday is——"

Memling smiled indulgently, and went on:

"Well, when Herman and I were in Waupeka we killed an idle hour by visiting the town's one amusement, a moving-picture parlor. It was there that I got my idea for this chef-d'œuvre. I think I may call it an inspired crime, and if our technique equals the grandeur of our theme our deed shall be long remembered in the annals of our art."

Short-arm looked at Slinky, and murmured: "Dat guy can play de dictionary bot' ways from de middle."

"If you will all be seated," Memling was saying, "I will explain in detail what is to be done."

The guests sank to various chairs, divans, platforms,



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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and model thrones, and the surplus sat on the floor. As Memling's eye ran along the motley array he was fascinated by the line of heads, every one envisaging some pernicious trait.

He took a palm full of oiled clay, and, as he spoke, he pinched and thumbed it into a little portrait. Then he laid it aside for future reference, and, taking up another lump, molded it into a rough likeness of some other face.

He finished his lecture and his gallery of clay cartoons at the same time. It was late, and he dismissed the assembly with the words:

"Keep your eye on the personal column, and don't forget that the signal for arriving on the field of action will be this notice:

"Nellie, please come home, and all will be forgiven. The lamp is burning and mamma is pining for you. PAPA."

With that, he opened the door. To the dismay of the whole company, they found that the weather had spent its hysterics, and a candid moon illuminated the gleaming streets. More than usual caution was needed, therefore, in sending the guests forth singly and by twos at such intervals as would not interest any policeman who might be met by chance—the usual way.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE MOVING PICTURE MOVEMENT

**H**ERE, whatcha tryin' to do? Where you goin' with all them false whiskers on?"

It was a policeman who spoke, and spoke gruffly, suit-



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## *The Moving Picture Movement*

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ing the action to the word. His prisoner wriggled to get away as he wailed:

"Wash out or you'll shpoil the picksher."

"What picture, you boob?"

"Movin' picksher, of coursh. Can't you shee the man with the machine? Lea' me loosh."

The policeman glanced over his shoulder, and saw a large camera box perched on a high tripod and presided over by a distinguished-looking person, who turned a crank diligently.

Seeing the officer, he stopped and came forward, with an aristocratic bearing that impressed even a Ucayga policeman. And he said:

"I don't wonder, officer, that you apprehended my friend, there, for his make-up is suspicious. Ucayga is lucky to have such a watchful police force. But my friend is merely one of the members of our troupe of moving-picture artists, and I can vouch for him."

Officer Dowd was overawed by the stranger's tone and mellowed by his tribute. But he retained composure enough to demand:

"You can vouch for him, hay? And who are you, I'd like to know? I never seen you in Ucayga before."

"Dear me, no. I'm from New York. I'm the manager of the—but here's my card."

Officer Dowd read the pasteboard with an official knotting of brow and protrusion of lip:

FLICKERLESS FILM SERVICE, INC.

New York, New York.

L. B. CLYMER, Field Mgr.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Officer Dowd cleared his throat, as if he were clearing a courtroom, and gulped:

"Are you Mr.—Mr.——"

"Yes. We have come to your beautiful city to take some views because the scenery is so fine. It is the nearest thing to Paris we can get in the State. I love the locale."

Officer Dowd almost beamed: "Yes, I reckon our locale is about as nifty as any in these parts."

The appeal to civic pride shook the resolution of the municipal sentinel so that he was ready for the final and irresistible bribe—a free ticket.

"Clymer" felt in his pocket absently:

"These films of ours will probably be shown in the Ucayga Nickelorium next week, and if you will present this card to the man at the door he will furnish you with two of the best seats in the house. What night shall I make it for?"

"Thursday is her night off," the policeman mused aloud, and Memling knew he was his.

He said, with deep vexation: "Oh, pshaw, I've left my passblank in my other waistcoat. But you shall have all you want later." After dangling this thistle before the officer, he added another lure:

"How would you like to be in one of the pictures?"

Dowd rubbed his stubble. "Well, I don't know. Would Norah see me there Thursday night next?"

"She certainly would—a thousand pictures of you—this machine takes hundreds of photographs a minute, you know."

The thought of a thousand photographs of himself was stupefying. He whispered:

"No, I don't know. Does it?"



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## *The Moving Picture Movement*

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"Yes. Everybody in town would like to see you in action. You really must help us out."

"Well, it's kind of lonely out here in this part of town. I've nothing much to do just now."

"Splendid! Our first picture represents a thrilling daylight robbery—a lady's purse is stolen, and the thief is pursued all over the neighborhood and finally captured. It would be splendid if you should be in at the climax. What do you say?"

If any officer could have resisted the immortality of it, this officer was not that officer. Dowd blushed as he answered:

"Well, I don't mind. The run would do me good. Norah says I'm getting a little ongbongpongy round the belt."

Memling outlined the scenario. He would have preferred something more original, but originality is suspicious.

It had been planned that Snubby Nettler should snatch the purse of Memling's sometime model Nellie, who had come along with the troupe. Knowing, however, that Nellie's purse was a mere "prop," it occurred to Snubby to improve on the libretto.

Among the crowd that gathered about the machine was a fat and florid citizeness of Ucayga with an obese hand bag. It looked good to Snubby, and he snatched it, and shot away like a sprinter hearing the starter's pistol. The fat lady—one Mrs. Oberfelder, as it transpired—let out a shriek that would have tested a phonograph, and took after Snubby, followed with great delight by as much of Ucayga as was not otherwise engaged.

Memling could have fainted with rage; but, seeing that Officer Dowd was looking at him inquiringly, he smiled,



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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and nodded, and began to turn his crank with vigor. Officer Dowd's bulk quickly faded from foreground to background, and round a corner out of the frame.

The rest of Memling's troupe, in motley attire, chiefly selected for its disguising qualities, stood idly wondering what to do.

"Keep after him!" yelled Memling. "Get that purse back, or the whole jig's up."

"What'll we do if we find him?" cried Short-arm.

"Killum!" roared Slinky, as he flashed across the line.

Sick at heart, Memling followed. There were many vacant lots in the outskirts, and by cutting across them he got near enough to the chase to be seen now and then by Officer Dowd. Whenever that puffing constable glanced Memling's way the panting sculptor made a violent pretense of turning his crank.

At last, in despair he chartered a passing milk wagon. The horse had seen better days, and set off with buoyant hilarity. He failed to take one fence, but negotiated some very respectable ditches. The driver was too excited to hear the clamor of the jouncing milk cans or to hear the comparative silence abaft when the last of them had danced over the end gate and spattered its pale-blue contents in the dust.

Snubby made a long flight of it, and the tail to his kite was frittering rapidly away. Mrs. Oberfelder was one of the first to sink down and prepare for a death by asphyxiation. Memling's troupe gave out gradually, all except Nell, who felt that she was dying, but kept on for Memling's sake. But Officer Dowd, doubly ambitious to gain fame and lose flesh, made a splendid pursuit, aided by numerous small boys and dogs.



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## *The Moving Picture Movement*

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Memling encouraged him with shouts and by turning the crank always when Dowd looked back.

Suddenly Snubby whisked round a distant corner, and was lost to view. Memling groaned aloud. But the milkman said:

"I know an alley where I can head him off. Shall I?"

Memling shrieked his assent, and the milk wagon, turning into a shabby lane, went hurtling past a long series of back doors, woodsheds, ash piles, garbage heaps, stables, and panicky chicken yards.

Through a rift between sheds, Memling caught sight of Snubby speeding down the next street, the red purse making a pleasant note of color. He put his hand out, and the milkman stopped the horse so short that Memling catapulted over him.

But he was too furious to know or care how hurt he was. He got to his feet, and unshipped the tripod from the camera box, while Snubby's footsteps came nearer and nearer.

As he dashed past Memling's concealment, the sculptor thrust the tripod between his feet, and Snubby went to earth in a five-legged chaos.

Memling put his foot on Snubby's wrist and wrenched the red purse loose. He was capable of murder, but in the distance he saw the mob of pursuers approaching.

"You hold him!" he cried to the milkman, and, setting the camera box on the fence, he turned off endless yards of imaginary film, while Officer Dowd and his followers clattered up, gasping and sweating, but happy in the thought that their deed was not without record.

Officer Dowd was crushed to learn that he was not the captor, but Memling appeased him by posing him for a final tableau with the culprit in one hand and the red



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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purse in the other. And he promised him the center of the rolling stage in the next drama.

Snubby's line of flight had brought him round near the starting point, and Mrs. Oberfelder soon limped up, demanding vengeance between gasps.

Her, also, Memling appeased by explaining that it was all a careless error, by promising to name the film "The Red Purse," and by an insinuation of free tickets.

When her first flush of rapture had subsided, she protested that she would look ridiculous in the scene where she flopped. Memling explained:

"At that moment, madam, realizing the delicacy of the situation, I turned the camera away. If, however, I find, on developing the film, that you are represented in any but the most flattering light, I shall carefully excise that portion of the reel."

This overwhelmed Mrs. Oberfelder. She did, indeed, let fall a hint that she could do better if she were allowed to go home, to get on her other hat, and run the Marathon again. But Officer Dowd magnificently ordered her to move on. And that incident was closed.

## CHAPTER XII

### DELILAH FINDS A SAMSON

THE Flickerless Film people met in council of war, later, and Snubby was tried by court-martial. Goldtooth was in favor of "someshing wish boiling oil in it"; Slinky was for instant death; Nellie asked only to get her nails into his eyes; and Short-arm Clary begged the privilege of kicking him all the way to New York.

But Snubby wept, and explained that impulse and



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## *Delilah Finds a Samson*

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habit had got the better of judgment; he promised miracles of atonement if he were allowed to remain.

Fearing that he might be more dangerous at large in all his indiscretion, Memling decided to keep him on probation, and Slinky curdled his blood with promises of what he would do to him if he overstepped instructions again.

That afternoon, Memling and his cohort set forth on another campaign. Admiring citizens, adoring children, and gleeful dogs of every breed cluttered their path, and asked multitudinous questions.

The morning's hippodrome had been carried on in the immediate neighborhood of a superb and stately residential estate surrounded by high walls except in front, where a frowning iron fence gave a view of wide lawns, tall, flunkey-like oaks, and a well-groomed brook contributing to a perfectly correct lake.

This was the Van Veen place, and Memling set up his tripod within a stone's throw of the iron gate. He was pleased to see that Officer Dowd was chatting with a burly varlet, evidently the watchman.

Memling had noticed him that morning observing Snubby's flight. Now, when Officer Dowd sauntered to Memling's side as if he owned him, Memling was delighted to see that the watchman followed, leaving the great gate open.

Dowd introduced him:

"Say, Mr. Clymer."

"Yes, Mr. Dowd," said Memling.

"Shake hands with Tom Beals, here."

"Delighted, Mr. Beals," said Memling.

"Pleased to meecha," said Beals, amiably trying to crush the slim, white hand Memling gave him. But the



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sculptor's hand was used to hewing marble, and it was the watchman who winced, then added: "You're all there with the grip, young feller."

"Thank you," said Memling.

Beals was graciously pleased to ask several questions about the mysterious machine in the box.

Memling answered them with technical terms. Short-arm Clary had told him a number of things about automatic fire shutters, intermittent movements without star wheels, lamp houses, condenser mounts, tension springs, and the like. Memling remembered the names, but applied them all wrong, and Short-arm blushed with vicarious shame. The watchman, however, never knew the difference. He was profoundly impressed.

Dowd was as proud of Memling as if he had invented him. He said: "Better put Beals in one of yer pitchers, Mr. Clymer. Or would he break the camera with that mug of his, do you think?"

Memling was groping for some plausible disclaimer, when Nellie spoke up. "You're jealous of him, Officer Dowd."

She winked at Beals, and he crumpled completely. Delilah Nellie urged Samson to join the Philistines. He trembled with desire, but protested:

"What if the old man was to see me picture?"

"Ah," Dowd roared, "old Van Veen don't go to no movin'-picture shows—a box at the Meetropolitan Opry House is the cheapest thing he'd set in."

"That's so," murmured Beals feebly.

Dowd inquired importantly: "What's the programme this afternoon, Mr. Clymer?"

"Well, I was going to do a picture representing a thrilling rescue from drowning, but I don't see any beautiful body of water round here."



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## *Delilah Finds a Samson*

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"There's a nice lake on the Van Veen place."

"Yes, but that's private property. I presume we'll have to give it up. Nellie, here, was going to be thrown into the water by Herman, here, and be rescued by Mr.——"

"I'd like to see that," said Beals, and then, with a languishing look at Nellie: "I wouldn't mind savin' you from drowning meself."

Nellie answered the look with an ocular volume, but all she said was:

"Can you swim?"

"Can a duck?" said he.

Memling sighed: "I wish I'd spoken to Roger, but I forgot that he had a place here."

Beals was staggered by that word, "Roger."

"D-do you know the old man?" he gasped.

Memling turned to Slinky with a smile: "Do I know Roger Van Veen? Ha, ha, ha! Do you remember, Herman, that night we were on his yacht, when he laid his hand on my shoulder, and said, 'I'll never forget, Henry, that, if it hadn't been for you, I'd not be alive to-day?' "

"I remember it poifect," said Slinky. "And I says to him——"

"Don't tell it!" said Memling, with a warning gesture. "It would sound like boasting."

Slinky turned to Beals: "Me frien' here is so modest dey's no livin' wit' him."

Beals thought hard for a while, before he said:

"Well, I guess you'd better come on in, and take any pictures you want to."

Slinky was about to emit three cheers, but Memling sighed:

"I couldn't think of it without Roger's permission."

"Aw, come on in," urged Beals. "The old man would



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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git sore on me, if I turned down a friend of his. He's crazy about artists and that sort of thing."

"But you don't know me," Memling persisted.

"I know a gentleman when I see one, and I'll take the risk," said Beals. "He can't do more than fire me."

Memling resisted some more, but finally suffered himself to be led into the inclosure with his crew. Beals drove back the crowd that tried to follow, and even advised Officer Dowd to stay outside and mind his own business. It was a pitiful exhibition of human jealousy, and Nellie giggled to feel that she was the cause of it.

Once the Flickerless Film troupe was within the private Eden, Beals locked the great gate on the rest of Ucayga. As the little company strolled toward the lake, Slinky could not help murmuring to Gold-tooth Leshner:

"Must seem natural to you to be inside the high walls wunst agane."

"Ah, you clozhe your moush!" said Gold-tooth.

Meanwhile, Nellie was saying to Memling in a confident one, just loud enough to reach Beals' ear:

"I'd rather be rescued by Mr. Beals than by anybody else. I'd feel safer with him. He looks so strong."

After that, wild horses could not have dragged Beals from the task. He brought up a pretty skiff, named *Ulalume*, and murmured for Nellie's private ear:

"I know a prettier name than that."

The glance she gave him was from the same box of tricks used by the Lorelei in her well-known specialty—the famous "men-die-for-it" brand.

A little drama was rehearsed on the beach before proceeding. Nellie was the ferryman's daughter, fiercely wooed by the wicked lord of the manor with hellish purpose. But she loved, and was loved by, the honest black-



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## *Delilah Finds a Samson*

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smith. Slinky was the lord of the manor, aided by a pair of upstart mustaches and a perfidious silk hat. Short-arm was to have been the honest blacksmith, but he yielded to understudy Beals with excellent grace, explaining to Slinky:

"It saves me from gettin' me pants wet, and, besides, I got a nasty cough the last time I was in Dannemora."

According to the drama, Slinky paid pantomime court to Nellie, but she "spoined" him, and he stalked away, gnashing his teeth visibly. He hid behind a tree, and muttered: "Coise her! Coise her!" in pantomime, while Nellie welcomed the honest blacksmith.

Beals was so grotesquely amateurish that the rest of the company turned away to hide their emotion, and Nellie bit her pretty lips raw to restrain her snickers. At the proper moment, the ferryman's daughter strolled away to pick pond lilies with her lover, who played a blacksmith just as a real blacksmith would, till he got out of range, when he became rather realistic. In their absence, the fiendish lord stole down to the waiting boat, and—happening to have an auger on his person—scuttled the ship and slunk away. Beals had made some objection to the proposed damage, but Memling had offered him money, and Nellie had offered him such a look that he had consented to repair the injury later.

Innocent of the lord of the manor's dastardly work, the ferryman's daughter bade the blacksmith good-by, entered the rowboat, and was pushed out into the stream, throwing kisses between oar strokes. As Memling turned the crank, the skiff began to fill and Nellie to utter silent, eye-piercing shrieks.

Two men held the impatient Beals while the boat foundered. At last, Memling gave the signal, and Beals broke



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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into the water like a retriever. The lake was only waist deep—and he knew it—but by stooping over he made it look very profound, and he had the rapture of saving Nellie's life without wetting her feet, though she confessed afterward to Memling that he almost suffocated her with his clutch.

Memling announced that the film would be a great success, and thanked Beals profusely. Beals was so eager to get away to change his dripping clothes that, when Memling admired one of the balconies as a superb place for a scene from "Romeo and Juliet," Beals told him to go as far as he liked.

"It ought to be done by moonlight," said Memling.

"There'll be a m-m-moon this e-e-eve-n-n-ing-g-g," said Beals, with chattering teeth. "I'll lend you a l-lad-dad-adder."

"*Juliet* ought to come onto the balcony from inside the house," Memling insinuated with bated breath.

Beals forgot to shiver.

"I'm afraid I couldn't let you inside without a permit from the old man."

"I suppose not," said Memling, and covered a sickening sinking of the heart with a brisk query: "By the way, where is Roger—I mean Mr. Van Veen? I hadn't seen him at the club for some days before I left town."

"Last I heard, he was in Lakewood. He don't keep me informed," said Beals, with a lurching sarcasm.

"Evidently not," said Memling. "I motored down to Lakewood a week ago, and he was just leaving for—let me see, I think he said Atlantic City. Now that I'm here, I'm rather sorry I didn't let him know. He has so often spoken of his little terra cottas in the cabinet in the salon and his Terburg hanging over the fireplace in the smok-



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## *Delilah Finds a Samson*

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ing room, and his big bas-relief by Goujon in the music room. By Jove, I'm sorry to miss that!"

If the watchman had ever had any doubts of Memling's acquaintance with old Roger Van Veen, they got their quietus from his evident acquaintance with the inside of the house. The watchman had no illusion that this soft-spoken Mr. Clymer was a millionaire. He was apparently one of those artist fellows old Van Veen used to bring to Ucayga, now and then, to entertain his guests on some special occasion, Dutch fiddlers, Italian tenors, French painters.

Old Van Veen paid them to be his guests, but he always treated them as if they were royalty. Thinking of these things, Beals felt that he might be in danger of one of Van Veen's red-hot reprimands if he were niggardly of hospitality to this nice young moving-picture artist with his crazy crew. He mumbled cautiously:

"If I on'y had a line from the old man, I'd let you in, in a minute. You understand, don't you?"

He did not catch Memling's grateful acknowledgment of an inspiration, as he said: "I quite understand. I admire your fidelity. I shall tell Roger—er—Mr. Van Veen about it when I see him next. I might take it into my head to telegraph him. No—well, I'll think it over. And now you'd better run and change your clothes, Mr. Beals, or you'll be catching cold. No, no, don't leave us in here; first, let us out, please, and lock the gate after us. And ever so much obliged to you."



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# *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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## CHAPTER XIII

### AN INTERMEZZO

IT broke the hearts of Short-arm, Gold-tooth, and the others to go empty-handed from such a fallow field, and to hear the great gate clang behind them. But they had sworn the most unquestioning obedience to Memling's commands, and they filed out, like a beaten rabble.

Officer Dowd met them, and he was plainly on edge with jealousy. Memling was weary of turning that crank and those foolish, empty spools, but he felt it advisable to keep Officer Dowd as a partisan. He suggested another event—a daylight burglary.

"These crime films are immensely popular," he explained. "They've driven the melodramas quite out of business. I wonder what house we could borrow."

"Mrs. Oberfelder lives just a piece off," suggested Dowd.

"An inspiration!"

Memling rang Mrs. Oberfelder's bell, and she came to the door, fresh from her own housework. She was overcome with chagrin, and explained that it was so hard to keep hired girls in Ucayga. Memling told her that to his artistic soul a woman was never so beautiful as when she was busy about her household tasks.

"Oh, Mr. Clymer!" she said, and it was unfortunate that Mr. Oberfelder was at his tailor shop, or he might have tasted the luxury of jealousy for the first time.

When Memling explained the proposed drama, and offered further free tickets, Mrs. Oberfelder felt as honored as if a Millet had asked to immortalize her on one of his canvases.



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## *An Intermezzo*

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She entered into the spirit of the little play, and while Memling turned the crank, she came out of the house, dressed in her best—this time with her Sunday hat on—locked the front door, put the key under the mat, and walked down the street, till Memling called to her that she had gone far enough.

Then she made a detour, and came back to join the grand stand of spectators back of Memling. Next Slinky, Gold-tooth, and Short-arm, in regulation sneak-thief uniform, with caps pulled down, collars pulled up, and black throat cloths, approached the house with elaborate caution, tried the lower-floor windows, and then shinned up the pillars to the roof of the piazza, entered from above, and reappeared at the windows to drop out various articles, lowering a mattress carefully and throwing down a lamp, according to traditions. Memling promised Mrs. Oberfelder a new one, as he heard her gasp.

If Officer Dowd had had more metropolitan experience, he would have recognized that the porch-climbing and second-story technique of the three thieves was according to the best schools, and was no amateur imitation.

But he was thinking of his own cues too busily to notice the work of other members of the cast. He broke in before his time, and would have ruined the film, if there had been any film to ruin.

Finally, at Memling's prompting, he was permitted to saunter on the scene, note the suspicious swag, and conceal himself behind a tree. As Slinky came gum-shoeing from the front door, Officer Dowd drew his revolver and stood him up. Gold-tooth followed, and was likewise arrested; then Short-arm made his exit, and was aligned with the others.

"Now, Mrs. Oberfelder, please," said Memling, and



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Mrs. Oberfelder hurried down the road, and made her reappearance R. U. E., and came to her piazza, where Officer Dowd called her attention to the sack of her mansion, and then to his three prisoners, whom he marched off down the walk till Memling called out:

"That will do, thank you!"

Then this play was over, and Officer Dowd went home to his supper, hearing already the cheers of the Nickel-orium audiences when they recognized the finest of Ucayga's finest at work for their protection.

The next morning early, a fully uniformed messenger boy of about the build of Snubby Nettler rang the bell at the big gate of the Van Veen estate, and handed Watchman Beals a telegram from Atlantic City:

Give my friend henry clymer freedom of house and grounds allow full inspection of art collection.

R. VAN VEEN.

Beals thought that Clymer must be somebody indeed, if old Van Veen would exceed the ten-word limit for him.

An hour or so later, Beals saw Memling posing a group in the distance. He went out to tell him the news. The group started away, and Memling after it, lugging his camera box. Beals began to trot, then to run. The faster Memling flew, the more determined was Beals to overtake him with hospitality.

At length, he caught Memling's eye, and ran to him, brandishing the telegram. Memling glanced over it, and smiled.

"It's just like dear old Roger. He sent me another."

He produced a crumpled message, and gave it to Beals to read:



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## *The Sound-proof Room*

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By all means make self at home don't fail to see art gallery have telegraphed instructions watchman see him kind regards.

ROGER.

Beals beamed on the kinetoscopist, and said:

"The place is yours, sir. What's your orders, sir?"

"I'd like to do the 'Romeo and Juliet' scene for one thing, and perhaps another dark picture. The moon was so superb, last night, it seems a pity to waste it. Meanwhile, I might take a look at those pictures and statues."

"Come right along, sir. You and your friends."

Memling lowered his voice: "I'll not bring them all, I think. I'm afraid they're not all connoisseurs. But I'd like to have Miss Cresap and Herman with me."

"Sure!" roared Beals, and added, "Sir."

After instructing the rest of the crew to bivouac in the vicinity, Memling took Nellie and Slinky along, and the watchman threw open the gate, and, later, the huge door.

### CHAPTER XIV

#### THE SOUND-PROOF ROOM

THE house was like a gorgeous tomb, cold, spookily dark, and heavy with dust. Every room was a silence and a mystery. Beals lighted the gas. He explained that the house was furnished with electricity by its own dynamo, which was not run in the absence of the household.

Memling and Slinky made mental note of each gas jet.

The watchman showed an inclination to loiter behind with Nellie, or to hurry on ahead with her, and Slinky and Memling made long pauses before certain pictures,



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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statues, and cabinets, holding conversations apparently of artistic discussion, but probably not.

Slinky grew impatient at Memling's delay over some of the old Netherlandish masters or the ancient Greek figurines. He could not see what was to be found in them after one good look. He lacked the artist's dissecting eye.

"Would you like to see the upstairs rooms?" said Beals.

"If it's not too much trouble," said Memling.

They were led upstairs through more palatial sumptuosities all yearning with loneliness and disuse.

"They's one queer place you'd ought to see," said Beals, with a chuckle. "It's the old man's 'safe-deposit vault,' I call it."

He found a key among the many on his ring, and, opening a thick door, led them into a room handsomely furnished, but without windows of any sort. Beals explained that the ventilation was by a series of gratings and a chimney to the roof.

"The old man sometimes has insomnia when Wall Street gets on his nerves. He can't sleep if they's a speck of noise. He'd jump if you dropped a pin on the floor, and the sparrers in the morning drive him mad. So he built himself this sound-proof room. He can't hear a sound from outside—not if it was a cannon."

"And by the same token," said Memling, "if he were to yell his head off in here, he couldn't be heard outside, eh?"

"No, I s'pose not," said Beals. Memling and Slinky exchanged one glance. It was enough.

It was some hours before Memling consented to leave the house. Then he strolled about the gardens.



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## *The Sound-proof Room*

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"It must be rather lonesome here for you of nights," said Memling. "Or perhaps you're married?"

"Not yet, sir," said Beals, glancing at Nellie.

"Aren't you afraid to be here by yourself? I should think you'd be uneasy about burglars."

"Not while Mr. Gorgon is around, sir."

"And who is Mr. Gorgon?"

"The dawg. Kind of a mixture of Great Dane, bloodhound, mastiff, and bull."

"Sounds rather dangerous."

"He'd wake the dead, and eat the living. I'm sorry for the man that wanders in here after dark, sir."

"And where does Mr. Gorgon live?"

"I keep him in the stables, in the daytime. Would you like to see him, sir? He's a nice dawg before dark."

"I'd love to."

So they were all presented to Mr. Gorgon, and he fawned upon them when he was satisfied with their credentials.

"I don't think we'd better try our moonlight pictures, after all," sighed Memling.

"Why not, sir?"

"I'm afraid Mr. Gorgon would make mince-meat of my actors."

"Oh, as for that, I'll keep him locked up to-night till after you're through."

"That's very kind of you. And where does this road lead?"

"Oh, that leads to the side gate, where the trucks and things come in by the back road."

Then Memling and Slinky strolled out of Van Veen-dom into Ucayga, and Beals proudly showed Officer Dowd the telegram. Memling referred to the programme



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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for the evening, and Dowd expressed a willingness to be present, but Beals did not accept the invitation to invite him in.

On the way back, Memling explained to Dowd, as he had explained to Beals, that instantaneous photographs must be taken with especial care in the moonlight. Also he was to take a moonlight burglary scene. He regretted that Dowd could not be present. And Dowd pouted hugely:

“I wouldn’t care if it was a real burglary. That feller Beals is so durned unpolite to me, I’d like to get even with him.”

### CHAPTER XV

#### THE GREAT CINEMATOGRAPHIC CRIME

**I**N the moon-flooded balcony, Nellie was looking her best. She had let her hair fall over her shoulders, and from where he stood in the lighted room back of her, Beals was saying to Short-arm:

“She looks good to muh.”

In the rose garden below, *Romeo*—Slinky, in tights and wig—was stretching his hand upward to meet her down-stretched hand, and Memling was turning the crank. Through the distant palings, Officer Dowd looked enviously, then went on about his business.

There was another tableau, with *Romeo* on the balcony ledge, and a rope ladder dangling below him as he bade farewell to *Juliet*. Something went wrong with the cues, and Memling hurried up to the room to rehearse the actors.

As he entered the chamber above and talked to Beals,



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## *The Great Cinematographic Crime*

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Gold-tooth and two other "strong arms" swarmed up the ladder, and cowered in the shadow.

Slinky *Romeo* wore a cloak, and took it off to readjust it, just as Nellie noted that her slipper had come untied. She glanced at Beals, and he gallantly dropped to his knees before her. As he bent down, Slinky suddenly flung the cloak over his head, and drew it tightly about his face. At the same time, Gold-tooth and the second and third thugs dashed into the room, and fell on the struggling giant.

Gold-tooth drew from his pocket a short blackjack, but Memling caught his arm, Slinky administered the necessary repose by smiting the wrestling watchman just behind the ear with his naked fist. Beals went to the floor with a slithering wriggle that made Nellie shiver. But he was speedily toted to the sound-proof apartment, which Slinky opened after some delay in finding the right key.

As the door was about to close on the silent figure, Nellie commanded: "Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" and she held up the whole crime while she deposited a brace of sandwiches she had brought along, and lighted the gas for his future comfort.

Memling understood, and laid an approving hand on her shoulder. Then the hermetic door was locked and fastened from outside with stout wires from its knob to the nearest newel post.

And now all was feverish activity. Memling directed everything. He slashed the old Dutch masters from their frames. He wrapped the statuary in venerable rugs from the Orient. He handled the Tanagra dolls as if they were tiny children, and he swaddled each in some storied tapestry from old looms.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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He forced his nimble aides to put down the gaudy knickknacks they valued for their sheen, and to take only what he selected. He kept order by threatening whatever punishment came first to mind.

Meanwhile, Short-arm had been sent to the rear gate, which he swung wide to admit a furniture van borrowed for the occasion from a local expressman, whom a five-dollar deposit had convinced of good faith.

Hearing the clatter of the horses' hoofs, Mr. Gorgon, from his prison in the stable, set up a ferocious ululation. Glancing from a window, Memling faintly made out Officer Dowd's form clinging to the iron palings; and he grew uneasy. A row of neighbors and children had also glued itself to every interstice. The frantic alarms of the watchdog got on the nerves of the marauders and the spectators alike.

Memling called Slinky to him, and Slinky, clambering from a side window, dashed out by the rear gate and found his way to a drug store half a mile away, where he entered a booth and telephoned the fire department that Mrs. Oberfelder's home was aflame. Then he hastened back to the looting of Van Veendom.

Meanwhile, Memling had established Nellie in command of the forces, and, warning her to keep the plunderers careful, he went out with his camera box and set up his tripod on the moon-lit lawn.

He strolled over to where Officer Dowd was growing restive, and described the present excitement as a picture of the sacking of a castle in ancient England. Dowd volunteered to come to the rescue, as usual, but Memling explained that his costume was anachronistic, and that, besides, he doubted if the film would be a success, as the light was so dim.



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## *The Great Cinematographic Crime*

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He explained that the bundles which were already coming from the house and disappearing into the van were mere dummies supposed to be prisoners, fair maidens, and the like. And then, as a last resort, he said:

"By the way, here are those passes to the Nickelorium, next week," and he placed a few cards in the eager hand thrust through the fence.

As Dowd went to the nearest lamppost to read them, Memling went back to the camera box and made a show of turning the crank.

He cursed the carelessness of the looters, and whenever one of them stumbled with his precious burden, Memling's heart thumped in his breast. He heard Dowd calling something to him, and the spectators murmuring suspiciously; and the dog's uproar was filling the scene with evil portent. He wondered how long the truth could be concealed.

And then the fire bells clamored in the distance, and the audience vanished. Moving pictures were fascinating, but a fire was irresistible. Just as Slinky came panting through a hedge, the last of the plunder was stored aboard the van.

Memling stopped cranking, darted into the house for a last survey, stuffed into his pockets a few overlooked treasures, and paused to listen to a faint sound from above, as of some one pummeling a door.

Then he turned out the lights, closed the front door, and climbed up with the driver. The van, filled with art treasure like a Roman galley homeward bound from Greece, rolled out of the Van Veen preserves, and the yelps of the watchdog died in the far away.

Now and then, one of the gang was ordered to disembark and strike for New York alone, by a devious



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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pathway. At one o'clock, the van was halted in a dark ravine, and, by the light of an electric flash lamp, Memling painted out the name of the "Ucayga Express Co.," and painted on "The Manhattan Delivery Co."

At three o'clock, the signs of New York were increasing upon them, as the heavy-hoofed horses unwound the long, slow film of the highway. By the first daylight they made out a little platform at the railroad track where a colony of large tin cans awaited the first milk train.

Seeing that nobody was near to protest, Memling suggested that part of the milk cans might be appropriated for purposes of disguise. A dozen or more were lashed alongside and across the end gate. Thus embellished, the treasure ship moved into New York as a member of that daily jaded procession of weary horses and drowsy drivers that brings the city its nursing bottles in the early gloaming.

Slinky had a friend who was a coachman between crimes, and, at present, held a position with a wealthy family of globe trotters.

Slinky drove the van into the stable, which was also the dwelling of this man. The owners of the stable were in Europe, and the coachman hated idleness. So he sometimes collaborated with Memling and Slinky.

Seeing the van safely bestowed for the present, and feeling that of all the treasures on earth, a little sleep would be the most precious, Memling, Nellie, and Slinky hurried to the studio, and, dropping severally on whatever offered the first support, fell into the sleep of innocent laborers, who had earned the wages of repose.



## CHAPTER XVI

### "A GOOD THIEF A GOOD SALESMAN"

WE thieves are sadly misunderstood," Mr. Dirk Memling was saying to a number of peculiar persons seated in his studio. "I don't complain of any misunderstanding of our motives, gentlemen. Our motives are as bad as we are, and, as Herman would say, we are as bad as they make 'em. I refer to the public misunderstanding of our profession—or trade—or art—or what you will."

Some of the guests shifted uneasily. They were there on business and were eager to be at it. But to Memling philosophy was a necessary of life, and he went memling on:

"Those of you gentlemen who can read—and do—have doubtless noted in the magazines a great many stories devoted to people of our craft. The authors often lead their imaginary heroes into the most interesting adventures and extricate them with the utmost ingenuity. But they overlook the most difficult and the only practical part of our work—that is, the commercial end.

"Successful thievery is not a mere matter of enter and exit. Your good thief must be a good salesman or his risk and his troubles have been mere bravado.

"Playwriting is one of the few crimes I have never attempted, but a prominent dramatist told me at the club the other night: 'Any fool can write a play; it takes a



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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genius to sell one.' So I say: 'Any fool can steal almost anything; it takes a genius to sell it.'

"In the case of these magazines thieves I speak of, you have doubtless wondered why the authors are so strangely reticent about the methods by which their heroes realize on their loot. It is because authors are lazy, and selling stolen goods is hard. The authors usually ring down the curtain on the big situation, and there is no last act."

"Dat reminds me," Slinky Green broke in, to interrupt the intolerable lecture, "I was to a play once, and at de grand smilax in de nex' to de las' ack, de villain pulls a lever and drops de hero and heroine into de middle of a ragin' blast foinace."

The auditors sat forward with eager curiosity.

Memling smiled indulgently. "A very interesting situation. And how did the author get his people out of it?"

"Dat's what I wanta know," Slinky moaned. "Between de acks, a copper reco'nizes me and takes me to de station house. I was wanted for sumpum or udder at de time—I disremember just what. I begs de cop to leave me stay to de finish, but would he?—nagh!"

"And you don't know what happened?"

"I never could find out. When I had done me bit up de river, de play was offen de boards. I've ast a hunderd people, but never met anybody dat could put me next. I've waked up in de night many's de time and t'ought about dem guys in de blast foinace, and wondered how dey got out. Of course dey did, but how?"

There were signs of further restlessness among the guests. The discussion seemed to them academic and immaterial—or as Snubby Nettler put it in his own way: "What's all dis guff gotta do wit' de price of mutton?"



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## *"A Good Thief a Good Salesman"*

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What I wanta loin is: Do we get any money for our swag, or don't we?"

"Dat's what we all wanta loin," said Short-arm Clary.

Mr. Memling echoed: 'And dat's—that's what I want to know myself."

The others stared at him, pop-eyed and pop-mouthed.

Snubby expressed the general sentiment: "Well, you been engineerin' everyt'ing so fur, ain't you?"

"I have, and I'm proud of it."

"Den you'd otta engineer de rest of it."

"That's what I'm trying to do," said Memling. "But there are obstacles. Every great enterprise has its setbacks. Ours has come now. But, by the bye, where is Nellie?"

"She went out to scout round a little," said Slinky.

"Oh, of course. But as I was saying, gentlemen, everything ran as smoothly as the course of false love, as smoothly as on our own empty spools."

"So far so fine," said Short-arm. "But what good was it to us? We ain't a cent de better for de job."

"Not yet, but remember—we have a van load of priceless art works."

"Dey're priceless all right, all right," growled Short-arm. "We ain't had no price for 'em, dat's sure."

"And ain't going to get any to my t'inkin'," said Snubby Nettler.

"Patience, patience, gentlemen!" Memling insisted. "Stealing is one process; selling is quite another. There is almost always a hiatus."

"Well, I don't want no hiatus in mine," said Short-arm. "What I want is coosh. I done me work and I want me pay. You told us dat we'd be rollin' in wealt' if we follered your lead. We done exactly what you said,



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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but I ain't seen nothin' to roll in—not so much as a dollar bill.”

“All in good time, my boy,” said Memling. “That scoundrel Max Strubel promised solemnly to take everything off our hands at a fair price, but he has backed down completely. It is not my fault that he should turn out to be a liar and a coward. We might have expected a crooked art dealer to be everything that is false, but he had never failed me before.”

Slinky Green muttered: “He’s a yeller quitter and he done us doit. I t’ink we gotta right to go and boin his shop down over his lyin’ head for him.”

This proposition met with instant approval. It meant revenge, and it meant action; two strong motives among such restless temperaments as take to thievery.

But Memling’s voice was still for a Fabian delay:

“Let’s not fret over Strubel. He is not worthy of our revenge. We must look for somebody else.”

“Who t’ ’ell is they?” Short-arm demanded; and Memling explained:

“There are many crooked dealers in New York giving lessons in art to millionaires. We shall find another, but we must bide our time. One has no right to expect uninterrupted good luck in this sad world. Indeed, if one does not meet with uninterrupted bad luck, one may count oneself fortunate.”

“But when one ain’t had no cash in his kick for two weeks, one is apt to get sore on their luck,” said Short-arm Clary, wrestling with shadowy syntax and coming off worsted.

Memling went on: “I am exceedingly sorry. I have not been lunching at the Astoria myself. I am doing my best to find another market, but you must realize that I



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## *The Honor of a Thief*

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must proceed with extreme caution. To find a man who will pay spot cash for objects of virtù that he can sell only with delay and danger, is no easy task. It takes time."

"Takes time?" echoed Snubby Nettler. "We'll all be doin' time foist t'ing you know if we don't get rid of dat junk."

"De woist of it is," said Slinky Green, "dat we ain't even had no fun out of it—not a line in a paper. And I was certain we'd 'a' had columns and columns wit scare heads in pink letters a foot high."

### CHAPTER XVII

#### THE HONOR OF A THIEF

THE thief, like other anonymous poets, loves to see his work famous, even though himself may prefer oblivion. The cinematographic troupe had looted a millionaire's mansion, and had counted on reading the particulars of their masterpiece in every headline. The courts have ruled that part of an author's pay is the publication of his work, and a very real portion of the reward for the danger run by thieves is the luxury of sitting in obscure safety and reveling over the clamorous news of blindfolded detectives and romancing reporters.

But the Van Veen robbery, which they had counted on for a national sensation, was not even mentioned. It was a shocking oblivion, a sort of treachery on the part of the newspapers.

Memling tried to explain:

"The watchman Beals had doubtless learned from experience that old Van Veen objects to any of his em-



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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ployees tampering with publicity. When he was released from the sound-proof compartment where he had been locked during the robbery, he doubtless telegraphed his master a full account and asked for instructions. Old Van Veen doubtless ordered him to say nothing to anybody except the private detectives."

"Maybe he's dead," said Snubby as he glanced over his left shoulder uneasily. "Maybe he starved or smudged in dat compartment. You know it was sealed emetically."

"No fear," said Memling.

But there was fear, uncanny foreboding, a sense of centipedes betwixt the shoulder blades.

In any case the cinematographers did not like this silence. It was mysterious, ominous, appalling. The newspapers gave no clue to the clues the detectives were following. Even in the distorted press reports there is ordinarily some guidance for the hunted criminal. But this midnight hush had weight and terror as an Egyptian darkness. The suspense was almost unendurable.

The gang was like a squad of miners who have lighted a fuse and seen it scutter into the powder barrel without provoking any explosion. They listened, and waited, and wondered. Every moment seemed an age, yet nobody dared go near the powder barrel to see what was the matter.

"It gives me de creepsh," said Gold-tooth Leshner. "I can't get it off me mind. Itsh like de time when I had 'em—and had 'em bad. I kept sheeing shings everywhere. And now every time I hear a footshtep behind me, me shoulder itches like a detectuff was jusht goin' to lay a hand on me and shay: 'Come round to de shtation



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## *The Honor of a Thief*

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housh, Gold-tooth, de old man wantsh to have a word wit' you.' ”

Everybody shuddered and Slinky whimpered: “It’s sumpum awful.”

“And it ain’t on’y de detectuffsh I’m shinkin’ of,” said Gold-tooth. “I ain’t sure of our own shelves. Who knows but one of ush might shqueal on de whole bunsh?”

Short-arm Clary nodded. “That’s the worst of this business. One thief can’t trust another as far as he can t’row a bull by the tail.”

“Talk about honor among sheaves,” roared Gold-tooth, “there ain’t no shush shing—only in booksh maybe. Like as not we gotta coupla stool pidzheons among ush right now.”

This imputation brought Slinky Green up standing, and with him Snubby Nettler and others of the gang in congress. Fists were brandished and loud threats voiced. Thieves, of all people, cannot afford to have their honor questioned.

Gold-tooth faced them down with magnificence. “Ash the Good Book shays: ‘The guilty fleash when nobody purshoes.’ ”

Nobody there could afford to resist the Bible, and Gold-tooth went on: “I ain’t named a shingle name, gentsh. For all you guysh knowsh, I might be a shtool pidzheon myshelf. All I want to shay ish, dat delay ish dangheroush, and we ain’t makin’ nuttin’ by it. It’s high time for shomebody to shpeak the troosh plain.”

“You better shut up den, Gold-toot’,” snorted Slinky Green sarcastically. “You’ll never speak plain till you steal a set of ivories offen some guy dat sleeps wit’ his mout’ open.”

But Short-arm Clary rose to Lesher’s rescue. “Aw,



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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lettum alone!" he roared. "He's on'y tryin' to say what all of us knows. We done a neat piece of work. We made a perfect getaway, and we ain't got a cent out of it, and we're all scared to deat'. Like as not dat watchman is dead an' we'll all go to de chair for murderin' him."

So tense was the feeling, so imminent the mutiny, that when the door opened suddenly and a figure appeared unexpectedly most of the guests made for the windows. Snubby Nettler was half through the sash when his backward glance showed him that the newcomer was Nellie.

She was out of breath and frightened speechless. The rapturously relieved gang rushed to greet her. One brought her a chair, another guided her to it, a third fanned her, a fourth brought her something in a little glass, and another plied her with questions. Finally she responded enough to gasp:

"I've seen him."

"Who?" said everybody.

"Beals!"

"Beals?"

"Beals! Nearly bumped into him. You see, zize crossing Sixt' Avenyeh keepin' my eyes open fer coppers or plain-clothes men, I hoid voices behind me. One of 'em says: 'I've kicked myself all the way down from Ucayga.' That woid 'Ucayga' went through me like a knife. I stops in the dark by one of the El pillars like I was waitin' for a Fifty-nint' Street car. As the men passed me I hear the same fellow sayin': 'They called her Nellie. I'd know her among a million. She played me for a Reub, and I fell for her. But she had enough heart in her to leave me bread and water. The rest of the crooks would have let me die like a mad dog. I'd like to keep her out of it, but I'm going to land the men folks in Sing Sing or bust



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## *The Honor of a Thief*

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a rib.' He brushed me with his elbow as he passed and turned to say: 'Beg pardon, madam,' and went on without even suspicioning me."

She smiled, a little tenderly, at the memory of the compliment and of the escape. But the others were chewing hard on the word "Sing Sing." It made them peevish. Gold-tooth glared at Nellie till she lowered her eyelids in confusion.

"You shee! you shee!" he cried. "What did I shay about shtool pidzheons? We got one in our midst a'ready. She's gone dippy over that washman Bealsh."

"Have not!" cried Nellie, fisting her knuckles in his face. "I don't care—that! for him, but he was a poifect gempmum to me, and I'm glad he got out."

"You're glad he got out!" roared Slinky, "so's we can get in, eh?"

"Ah, go wan!" roared Nellie.

"I told you sho!" howled Gold-tooth, so gratified at being proved a prophet that he forgot his alarm. "She wants ush all to go to Shing Shing."

Nellie flatly told him where else he might go. The meeting was shocked at profanity from a lady, and Memling felt that the only preventive of a riot was a dispersal. He restored calm enough to explain that in two days he would try to have some money for everybody and adjourned the meeting for forty-eight hours.

The guests went out of his house as stealthily as if they had been going into it, and no policeman noted their quality or quantity.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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### CHAPTER XVIII

#### HALF A RUG

THE next day Memling was abroad early making inquiry of the shady art dealers in the hope of finding one who would buy a huddle of master works for a song. His errand was unsuccessful, and he came back to the studio disheartened.

Nellie and Slinky had been busy in his absence. They had taken various statuary out of bundles. On the floor were three or four rugs stolen merely as wrappers for the marbles.

One of the objects was a complicated bust of Othello, with black marble for the face, alabaster for the robe, and lapis lazuli for the jeweled neck chain.

Memling was a purist in sculpture, and he roared to Slinky:

"Take that marble chromo out of here. That's some of your work, Herman. I told you that if you ever expressed an art opinion and it was wrong I'd throw you out."

"I ain't expressed no opinion," said Slinky hastily.

"Your selection was an opinion," said Memling. "You stole that awful thing from Van Veen because you liked it, and you wrapped it in that old half of a rug because you liked that. Throw them both out."

Nellie interposed.

"You know more about sculpture than what I do, Dirk, but you don't know the foist thing about rugs. That piece of carpet is a beaut, and no mistake."



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## *Half a Rug*

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Memling knew that he knew nothing about the work of the loom, and he withered.

"Leave the rug on the floor, then, but get that abominable marble goulash out of my sight."

"Where shall I stow it?" said Slinky.

"Throw it at a cat or give it to the policeman, but don't let me see it again."

Slinky hustled the Moor's head into concealment, but the rug was suffered to remain.

All that afternoon Nellie tried to explain to Memling why the fabric on the floor was commendable. But he was a sculptor, devoted to simplicity, unity, and strength. He could not grasp any principle in the design of the rug.

"It has no design at all," he said. "The color scheme isn't bad, it's rather inoffensive—almost mellow. But that's the work of the dirt, I'm sure. Now, that other rug, I can see." He pointed to a huge Feraghan, woven in a factory and washed in coffee.

Nellie would not permit this huge cloth to be praised.

"I'll get a rug expoit in here," she stormed, "and you can try to sell him the two of them."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said Memling. "Do you want to have me suspected of being in the rug-selling business? First thing you know he'll be demanding the pedigree, and then we're gone."

It was hunger that ended the wrangle, and the hunger was only partially satisfied at a cheap table d'hôte. Memling was not in funds, and he hated the woeful tablecloths and the rust-stained napkins. But the devil was driving, and he was forced to be content with tiny portions served on suspicious ware.

The next day he resumed his canvass of the approach-



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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able art dealers. But times were dull, and he could not awaken even an interest in his merchandise.

Late that afternoon he came back to his studio more dejected and lonely than before. The sunset stretched along the west in a rug of such glory that its upper fringe reached the north light of his studio and steeped the floor in a winish glow.

Suddenly Nellie arrived. She had a defiant look on her face, and she said:

"I saw a rug peddler on the street going into the house next door, and I told him to come here when he was through."

"A rug peddler? Good Lord, Nellie, I'm not buying rugs. I've got a house full of fool things, and I was wondering where I could get our dinner for nothing—or what amounts to the same thing, have it charged."

"You don't have to buy any rugs," said Nellie. "But you can pretend to look 'em over, can't you? And then, just kind of offhanded, ask him what he thinks of those two—your big ugly blanket and my little half of a rug. I'll bet you anything you say, he chooses the one I like."

"Since neither of us has a cent the betting is safe. The one that wins loses."

The bell rang and Nellie brought in a cringing Armenian half hidden like a little pack mule under a huge saddle-bag.

He dumped his stock in trade on the floor, and began to undo the fastenings. Memling was so sorry for him with his hungry zeal, and so ashamed of posing as a purchaser, that he refused to play the game.

"Don't untie that truck," he said gruffly, "I wouldn't pay a dollar for the stair carpet that Solomon rolled out for the Queen of Sheba."



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## *Half a Rug*

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The Armenian's flicker of hope died from his swart face, and he bent to pluck his burden from the floor. His face almost touched the little semi-rug. He paused like a statue of effort. His mouth widened, his nostrils widened, his eyes enlarged.

Then he fell on his knees, and caught the rug in twitching fingers, reverently testing the woof and murmuring words that Memling and Nellie could not understand.

"I told you so," said Nellie. "Maybe you'll believe me next time. I bet it's worth a hundred bones at least."

With some difficulty Memling persuaded the fellow to translate his rhapsody into onerous English.

"Where you get theese rug, Meester Jantleman?" the kneeling peddler asked.

Memling did not change color as he answered:

"I lived in Italy for some years."

The Armenian nodded.

"Dat's all right. Long tam ago the Eetalians ships come to Turkey and all over our land. They make forts at Galata and Stamboul and they buys the wahnderful rugs. How much you pay for thees rug, yes?"

"Yes," said Memling with a smile of evasion.

The Armenian appreciated the spirit. To him bargaining was a fine art. He felt that he had a fencer worth crossing swords with.

"You don't want to sell him, no?"

"N-no," said Memling, but not with finality.

The Armenian understood this, too. It was plainly a shrewd man's invitation to proceed.

"You know who makes thees rug, maybe? Yes? No?"

"Naturally," said Memling.

The spaciousness of the room in pigeonholed New



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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York, the sumptuousness of the studio's appointments deceived the peddler. He thought he was in a rich man's house. But he knew that rich men know the value of things better than poor men.

"You would not sell me theese rug for any price?"

Memling had acquired some skill in bargaining with receivers of stolen goods. He answered:

"Everything has its price if you can pay it."

This also the Armenian believed. He hesitated a while, then he said carefully:

"Did I offer you feefty dollars for thees, what you say?"

"I should say: 'Get out, I'm busy.'"

The Armenian threw him a look of respect. "Did I offer you wan hoonderd dollars——"

"I'd say: 'Get out, I'm busy.'"

"Two hoonderd——" Memling frowned—"and feefty." Memling turned away. "Five hoonderd!" Memling paused. His back was to the Armenian, his startled face was not to be seen. But he shrugged his shoulders and forced a contemptuous laugh.

"Wan t'oosand," the Armenian persisted, wheedling.

Memling was thinking hard. What was worth picking off a floor for a thousand dollars in cash must be worth a great price. He took the plunge. He whirled on his heel with simulated irritation.

"I tell you I'm busy. Do you think I'm fool enough to make you a present of a rug like that?"

The Armenian gasped:

"You call wan t'oosand dollars a present!"

"For a rug of that period, yes."

"But it is only half a rug. The other half is in—well, I know."



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## *Half a Rug*

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"So do I," said Memling.

"My brother has search' the world for this half? If I should offer twanty-five hoonderd, what you say?"

"I'd say—oh, what's the use—you haven't got money enough to buy it."

The sweat was gleaming on the glossy black hide.

"I got—t'ree t'oosand dollars here. I could get mooch more."

Memling laughed incredulously. The Armenian looked round with caution, then dug out from somewhere a parcel of bills.

Memling could hardly believe his eyes. He laughed. "You don't look it. But how much have you got?"

"T'ree t'oosand dollars. But I can get more from my brother in Pheeladelphia. I could be here again in two, t'ree days."

Memling thought swiftly. In the old years when his art was sculpture, he had known people to talk big commissions and promise to come back. They never came back. This man would never come back. Memling decided at once:

"Oh, well, since you've got your heart set on the rug, give me what money you have and take it."

The Armenian shivered with triumph, and crammed the bills in Memling's hand with such speed that the sculptor almost repented his haste in the bargain. Still, the cash was a consolation. Three thousand dollars was just three thousand dollars better than the nothing he had had.

He shoved the roll into his coat pocket carelessly, and, taking up a book, sank into a chair with a yawn.

The Armenian, hissing with delight, rolled up the rug as if it were something super-sacred. When he had it



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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safe under his arm he returned to the peddler he had been, and said hungrily:

"Maybe you buy some other nice rug cheap. I got here beautifool old prayer rug from Kulah, a seelk Ladik that make the beautiful lady's little feet happy." He looked at Nellie bewitchingly. "And I got a Yomud, and two really truly Bergamos."

But Memling said: "Better get out or I'll change my mind and take back the one I gave you."

The Armenian lost no time in vanishing.

Memling lifted the weighty roll of bills from his sagging pocket, but forgot to gloat over it, as he mused:

"I wonder what kind of rug it was? Some of those historic things bring great prices. I suppose the poor dog that wove it lived on a little corn meal for years while he made it—and ground the corn himself. I'd give an arm to know what the story of that rug was—but I was afraid to ask."

Nellie was a bit uneasy.

"Do you suppose old Van Veen will trace it?"

"Nonsense. Those plutocrats never know what they've got. I'll bet I could sell old Van Veen half of his own paintings and he'd never recognize them. That's why I felt it my duty to rob him. It's like putting a miser's hoard in circulation."

Memling was so elated over his success that he felt a millionaire. With a disdainful magnificence all his own, he plucked off the outer five-hundred-dollar bill as if it were a dingy lettuce leaf and tossed it to Nellie.

"There's your commission, my dear. If it hadn't been for you I should not have had this to show to that gang of mutineers."



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## *Half a Rug*

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"Are you going to divide even with them?" Nellie asked.

"Divide even with those unwashed illiterates! Nellie, you astonish me. I shall tell them that I sold the rug for a thousand dollars—and I'll divide that even with them."

Nellie stared at him and blushed for him.

"I didn't think it of you, Dirk," she said. "I thought you was above crooked work."

Memling flushed at the rebuke. Then he smiled a rather harsh smile and spoke in words hard and rough like marble chips:

"Nellie, when I was an honest man I was an honest man. And the world cheated me. My own State cheated me. A gang of politicians ruined my life and my ambition and my sacred art in the name of graft. And nobody came to my rescue. I became a thief. I'm a good thief. It's a thief's business to steal, and I'm attending strictly to business. Business men gouge each other. How ridiculous for a thief not to steal from a thief. Besides, if I divided all this money among stupid thugs like Short-arm Clary and Snubby Nettler, they'd be drunk and talkative for a few days, and then just where they were.

"I'll give them a part of this. The next part of the loot I sell they shall have a part of, too, and so on in installments. The Cinematographic Crime shall amount almost to a pension. But as to playing fair with them, Nellie—nay, nay! You and I will spend our shares gracefully, artistically—and not fret over the square deal for the other thieves. Slinky shall have a good share for friendship's sake. But remember what dear old Goldtooth Leshar said only yesterday: 'Talk about honor among sheaves, there ain't no shush shing—only in booksh maybe.' Let's go to dinner. What's the best place?"



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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### CHAPTER XIX

#### WHAT NEXT?

**D**IRK MEMLING'S delight in exchanging the dilapidated half of a stolen and despised rug for three thousand dollars was almost ruined by his tormented desire to know what had given the rug its amazing value in the eyes of the shabby Armenian who bought it.

Curiosity gnawed on Memling's heart like an etcher's acid biting a copper plate. But the Armenian had gone as mysteriously and as irretraceably as the rug he worshiped and ravished away. The only proof of the transaction was the lump of governmental paper. The bills were very dirty and very soggy, but very real.

Memling washed his hands every time he handled them. They did not affect his conscience so unpleasantly. His cronies, Slinky Green and Nellie Gaskell, were so overjoyed at the sudden rush of money to the vacuum in the treasury that they never worried a whit over the rug's further history, past or future.

"De main t'ing," said Slinky, "is dat I swiped it offen old Van Veen's floor and you passed it on to a guy what done a disappear, leavin' behind a haystack of long green dat has all de aroma of new-mown hay. We got it for next to nuttin', and we sold it for more'n a good deal; and dat's what I call friendly finance. Forget de rug, Mr. Memling, and pass on to de next article of swag. In de woids of de auctioneer, 'Goin'—goin'—went! to de guy from Armenia.' Next, ladies and gents, I wanta call your



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## *What Next?*

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attention to a coupla dozen udder master woiks of paintin' and sculpcher by—who t'ell is dey by?"

Memling smiled at his enthusiasm.

"Those canvases are by Terborg and Van Mieris, and those two statues are by Carpeaux and Dubois."

Slinky shook his head over the hard words; but the spirit of joy was at large within him. He mounted the model stand and imitated the hoarse minstrels of the auction shops.

"Step up close, ladies and gents, and make sure dat dese canwases is hand painted. Dese dagoes has hard names, but dey could wopse a brush around sumpum grand. We have here a landscape by Mister Chauncey Toiboig, de champeen lightweight brush wrastler of Williamsboig. De scene represents George Washin'ton crossin' de Harlem River, taken by Mister Toiboig's own movin'-picture machine and colored by hand. After dat I will ast youse to kindly bid on Mister Hoibert Van Smear's portrait of 'Wenus takin' a bat', and next comes a coupla statutes by Monseer Carpoo and Dooboy, representin' nuttin' in pertickler, wit' nuttin' much on. And now we retrain to de Toiboig pitcher. How much am I bid? Do I hear a million bones for a starter? I'm listenin'—do I hear it?"

Those were great days in the studio. The three thieves had reached the heights of rapture. They had sold part of their loot for a high price. They had a mass of other loot whose value Hope, the auctioneer, rated at a fabulous sum. They had cheated their comrades in crime of their fair share, and they had the final bliss of terror lest at any moment the detectives might pounce upon them and prevent them from enjoying the fruits of their toil.

Their anxiety was increased by the knowledge that



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Gold-tooth Leshner, Short-arm Clary, Snubby Nettler, and the others who had assisted in the great cinematographic robbery were spending their share of the swag in riotous living and in the consumption of expensive and unusual wines which would render them irresponsible, conspicuous, and communicative.

What secrets those loose tongues might betray in their boastful bravado, who could tell? Who could tell into what treacherous ears those garrulous mouths might pour the story of their exploits? Memling had given them only a part of what he had promised them, but his only remorse was that he had not given them even less.

The more they pondered the uncertainty of their concealment the more eager the three cronies were to dispose of the greater treasures remaining and flee from danger. As they estimated it, they would realize money enough to keep them all in luxury for years. Slinky was for a trip to South America, but Memling longed to return to Europe with its art temples and its precious atmospheres so congenial to his soul.

Discretion cautioned unusual care in every step, but success intoxicated them to rashness. Their assets were liabilities, until they were turned into cash. How was that to be done?

Slinky eventually sweat out an idea, but he would not disclose it until he had tested its value. He said he would be out of town all the next day. Memling had no schemes at all. The great empty studio would have seemed to be an ideal place for meditation, but its very cavernous silence bewildered his mind. Being a city soul, he found that his truest solitudes were to be attained in a crowd. He could think best in a clatter. After a night of restless tossing



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## *An Unexpected Encounter*

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and vain cogitation, and a morning of no better success, he decided to take his luncheon at his club.

### CHAPTER XX

#### AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

**T**HOUGH the Mummers Club had its origin as a meeting place of stage people, so many editors, magaz-  
inists, artists, and art critics had flocked to it that it had  
become a cuckoo's nest of everything that was not  
dramatic.

There was a club saying:

"The best thing about the Mummers is that you never  
meet any one of those——actors there."

The club had achieved what the millennium promised.  
In its luxurious Eden the literary lion and the editorial  
lamb sat down together, the artistic leviathan and the  
swordfish critic swam at peace.

One of the best-liked members was Dirk Memling. No-  
body there imagined that he was a thief by trade. He  
was known to be a sculptor of gifts, and his talents were  
romancified by the melancholy veil of his early tragedy.  
Time had sweetened it into a legend whose pathos had  
become poetry, an elegy of art.

He was pointed out to visitors as one of the landmarks  
of the club, and his story was told in whispers of awe,  
of how he had won a commission to execute a pediment  
group for a new State capitol and had begun his work  
with supreme ambition and success, when all projects were  
stopped by the exposure of huge graft in the construction  
department with its side door into politics. The capitol



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had been completed, but over the forest of columns where the Memling group was to have stood yawned a huge triangle—an empty sepulcher of hopes.

The visitors were informed that Memling's heart was bankrupted with his purse, and he did no more great works. How he lived nobody knew, for he never exhibited anything. It was surmised that he gained commissions for portrait busts or for interior decorations of rich men's houses—for these were the bread and butter of most artists; the sculpture and the easel pictures that won notoriety at the galleries being usually no more than a man's press work, his publicity exploitation of himself.

But no one questioned Memling, and he found in the club a haven from his association with the illiterate and uncouth partners in his true livelihood. At the Mummies the talk was literary and artistic, and Memling could hold his own with the best of New York's conversation experts.

On this day he preferred not to talk. He chose a small table in a corner overlooking the garden. The chatter of the other members made a pleasantly murmurous background like a distant surf, and the *plat du jour* was corned beef and cabbage, a light New England refection which he had found strangely conducive to free thought—possibly because it kept his internal mechanism so intensely busy that it left his mind full play.

He was just acquiring a few shreds of ideas that promised well, when Herbert Haslam, a caustic art reviewer on one of the daily papers, came up, and, indicating the empty chair, asked what is technically known as a foolish question:

“Are you alone?”

“Very much,” said Memling.

“May I join?”



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"Delighted," said Memling—who was not delighted at all, for Herbert Haslam was known as the "Terrible Talker," the "Champion Chinner of the Club." A town wit had once put a placard on one of the club doors, "Exit in case of Haslam." Haslam talked wisely, but too well, too much.

Memling resigned himself to an avalanche of words. They would come from the heights, but they would come in avalanche. To-day, however, Haslam was not at all himself. He was amazingly silent. He murmured:

"It's a nice thing about this club, that a poor wretch of a critic can meet you men who are doing things and show you that he is human."

Memling answered: "Especially if he learns incidentally that his victims are human, too."

Haslam smiled sadly.

"Victims? I never roasted anything of yours."

"You've never had the chance," said Memling.

"That's so. Why don't you exhibit?"

"What's the use?"

"You do private work mostly, eh?"

"Private work exclusively."

"What are you doing now?"

"Resting. I've just finished a millionaire."

"Indeed. Who was it?"

"I don't like to boast."

"Gad, but you are modest. A sort of confidential sculptor to the rich, eh?"

"That's one way to put it."

Seeing that Haslam was in a reticent humor and evidently suffering from some distress, Memling flattered himself that he would get off easily. He hastened to order his coffee and cheese with Bar le Duc.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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But just as he was hurrying them down, who should stroll up but Clifford Girdlestone. He was dragging a chair after him. He was another who did much talking—he had little else to do.

“May I join you?” he asked; and Memling answered:

“As one of the few surviving actors in the club, I suppose we ought to treat you kindly. What’ll you have?” Memling was standing treat lavishly these days, being in funds.

“A green mint,” sighed Girdlestone.

Like an echo came a sigh of despondence from Haslam.

“What’s the matter with you two men?” said Memling. “Have you both been to Woodlawn?”

Girdlestone groaned: “You’d sigh, too, if you were an actor in the worst season in stage history.”

Memling smiled incredulously. “So far as I can judge from the theatrical wails, every season is the worst in theatrical history.”

“This one really is. For thirty weeks last year I played at good salary. This year I was in three failures, rehearsing nine weeks in all, buying three hundred dollars’ worth of costumes and playing exactly five weeks on salary out of the fifty-two.”

“How do you keep from starving?”

“I don’t,” said Girdlestone dismally. “I’ve been dead for three months.”

Haslam, being of an analytical nature, asked:

“What’s the cause of the theatrical slump?”

“Moving pictures!”

Memling started. His own performance with the cinematograph was too fresh in his past to be a matter of easy thought with him. He managed to ask:



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"What have moving pictures to do with—I believe you call it 'the legit'?"

Girdlestone answered with a roar: "What have potato bugs to do with potatoes? What did poison have to do with the death of *Hamlet's* father? They're killing the drama, that's all." He thumped the table so hard that he jiggled half of his mint essence out of the glass thimble. He regarded it with enlarged sorrow.

Haslam groaned a deeper groan, and said:

"Moving pictures have been my ruin, too."

Girdlestone, almost with professional jealousy, glowered at Haslam:

"How could the devilish things affect you?"

"Well, you see it was this way. Old Roger Van Veen, the millionaire, had a big art collection up at his summer palace in Ucayga. I was asking him what he had there, and he said he didn't know. He has two or three homes so full of masterpieces he doesn't know half of them by name. I told him he ought to have a catalogue made of them. I described the artistic volumes that some of the millionaires have had privately printed, and I told him that I myself had made the catalogue of the art treasures of Richard Bamfield."

"The big gambler?" from Girdlestone.

"The big gambler," said Haslam. "So old Van Veen got jealous and decided that he must have the most artistic catalogue ever printed. He asked me what I would charge to compile the book. I set a fancy price, and he nabbed it."

Girdlestone grew impatient: "What's all this got to do with moving pictures?"

Haslam explained:

"Just as I was packing up to go to Ucayga, along



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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came a band of thieves with an alleged moving-picture machine and pretended to take pictures round the place. They got the watchman in their toils, sent him a fake telegram from Van Veen admitting them to his palace, and once they were inside, gagged and bound the watchman, stuffed him into Van Veen's sound-proof sleeping room, and carried off the art treasures one and all—even to the rugs."

"The blackguards!" roared Girdlestone. "It's just like those moving-picture fiends. They'd do anything!"

Memling was flushed with excitement. His crime sounded rather ugly as described by an outsider. He gulped another cup of black coffee before he found nerve to ask:

"Haven't they arrested the robbers yet?"

"Not yet," said Haslam. "They've got all the public and half the private detectives after them. They'll catch them eventually. But meanwhile the scoundrels have stolen my job away from me. And I had planned to take my wife and kiddies on a fine vacation on that money. Now we'll stick in this hot town all summer."

Memling realized with a sickening at the heart how far-reaching and deep-ramifying are the evils and hurts that follow crime. He felt a flash of impulse to confess to Haslam:

"I'm the moving-picture fiend myself. I've got most of Van Veen's pictures, and statues, and rugs in my possession. Take them back and go ahead with your old catalogue."

It was a beautiful impulse that floated into his heart—white as a snowflake. It lived just about as long. Memling realized at once how intricately he had tangled a dozen other souls in his crime, men like Slinky, and Gold-tooth



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Lesh, and Short-arm Clary, and the girl, Nellie Gaskell, and others who had trusted him and whose exposure would be a peculiarly ugly treachery.

So the beautiful impulse melted and left no trace. Haslam had paid no attention to Memling's preoccupation. He and Girdlestone were exchanging curses against the moving-picture craze and all its demons. Memling left them to their anathemas and went his way. He walked the park through and through trying to work out a plan for selling the loot safely, but ideas evaded him like the sparrows, fluttering about his head and feet, yet refusing to be captured.

That evening he returned to the club for dinner. Haslam and Girdlestone were still there. They had adjourned to the barroom, and were supporting each other against its ledge, while they thickly described to the amiable barkeeper what evils the moving pictures had wrought in a hitherto peaceful world. They were both talking at once, and there was hardly a fault to be found with existence that they did not blame to the moving picture—the devil's own machine, the cinematograph—or “shinnymassograss”—as Girdlestone was pronouncing it by now.

The barkeeper went on polishing glasses, and with the perfect courtesy of barkeepers, murmuring “Yes, sir,” and “That's so, sir,” every now and then.

Memling left the twins of misery to their own bitterness and went up to his dinner. The small tables were all filled. Garrod, the painter, beckoned him to an empty place next him at the long table. A number of strange faces were there, but the conversation was general, as usual, and, as usual, no introductions were made—except perhaps to one's elbow neighbor. It was assumed that everybody present was a member, or a member's guest.



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Eventually the talk drifted round to paintings, and the names of various old and new masters were ping-ponged about. One small, elderly and unimportant-looking man whom Memling had not seen there before took a lively interest in the conversation, but seemed to rate the painters chiefly by the prices they had brought at the latest auctions.

Garrod leaned close to whisper in Memling's ear:

"That old dub seems to run a sort of Bradstreet's for old masters. Who is he, anyway?"

"I didn't get his name," Memling whispered back.

After dinner the group gradually dissolved and reassembled in the lounging room; the names of great painters were bandied about with the prejudices and the familiarities with which the general public talks of famous ball players or prize fighters.

"I think Rembrandt is a fine painter," said the dapper little stranger, as if he were uttering a new thing. "I have several examples of his work."

"Are you sure?" said Garrod cynically.

"Of course, I'm sure. Didn't I pay big prices for them?"

"That proves nothing," said Garrod. "It is estimated that there are thirty thousand forgeries of Rembrandt in existence—mostly in America."

"Good heavens!" gasped the stranger. He looked as if some one had told him that the subtreasury had gone into bankruptcy.

Garrod said: "I don't care so much for the big fellows that everybody knows and copies. I prefer some of the old masters that the man in the street never heard of—the little Dutchmen for instance—like Terborg and Van Mieris and——"



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## *An Unexpected Encounter*

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"They were mighty big little Dutchmen," said Memling.

"They were giants in miniature," said Garrod. "Why, Van Mieris could paint a glow of sunlight shining into a little room or a little hall just seen through a half-open door, and you'd want to cry, it was so beautiful; and Terborg could paint a pair of boots, or a forearm, or a woman's back hair, or a piece of plain wall so marvelously that you couldn't tell which of them had the most soul. Isn't that so, Memling?"

Memling said that it was so.

The dapper individual gasped: "Indeed! I don't think I have any of their works. Are they to be had in this country, do you suppose?"

Garrod exclaimed: "He doesn't think he has any of them! Imagine owning a Van Mieris and not knowing it!" Then he dropped the inhospitable sarcasm. "Yes, they turn up in the market now and then. They're pretty safe purchases, because the forgers and imitators and fakers haven't paid much attention to them. Isn't that so, Memling?"

Memling agreed that it was so.

"I wonder where I could get some of them," said the stranger, with an almost miserly cupidity. "I must put my agents in the track of them."

Garrod went on from rapture to rapture as if he were trying to steal Haslam's reputation for conversation, and occasionally turning to Memling to confirm him.

Memling answered almost absently, for his mind was in a whirl. Here perhaps was the very man he was looking for—come right to his hand, ready to eat out of it. He was a man of such evident means and such evident avidity for art treasures, and he seemed to know so little



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of these master painters, that Memling decided to sell him Roger Van Veen's art works if he had to put a pistol to his head.

Memling grew hungry as he visioned the large sums he might get from this person, but the element of danger was great, for the man might be a friend of Van Veen's, or he might call in experts to verify the authenticity of his purchases, and these experts might ask awkward questions as to the pedigrees and travels of these paintings. For such records are kept like the records of other blooded stock. But this risk had to be taken with anybody.

As Memling was urging himself to grasp the chance, risk and all, the stranger looked at his watch and announced that he must go. He said laughingly that he was a charter member of the club, but had not been there for ten years. He belonged to so many clubs that he had forgotten his membership in the Mummers. He seemed to have so much of everything that he could remember nothing.

As he moved from the clump of men he bowed with respect to Memling, whose name he had heard invoked several times as an authority.

Seeing his victim about to escape and to escape anonymously, Memling was seized with a sudden resolution. He rose, and, following the man, halted him at the head of the stairs.

"Excuse me," he said, "but you expressed a desire to possess a Terborg or two, and some Van Mierises."

"Yes."

"I happen to know where you could lay hands on some of them."

"Really! You interest me immensely. Are the pictures yours?"



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"Yes—no—that is, they belong to a poor widow of my acquaintance. You could make a good bargain and do an act of charity at the same time."

"I'm overrun with appeals for charity," said the man, with a snapping of the lips like closing the thin lids of a watch. "But I should like to see the pictures, Mr.—Mr.—Memling, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Where could I see them, Mr. Memling? At the home of the—widow, didn't you say? Who is she? Where does she live?"

Memling sparred for time. "I could let you know later when I have found out just when it would be most convenient for you—and the—the widow."

"Very good. Just telephone me, will you?"

"Certainly. Where could I reach you?"

"My number is in the book."

"Oh, of course. But—it's very stupid of me—I didn't catch your name."

The old man looked rather miffed, as if every one ought to know his name. Somewhat chillily he fumbled for his card case, and as he poked a pasteboard at Memling, he said almost testily:

"Let me hear from you soon. I sail for Europe at the end of the week. Good night, Mr. Memling."

Memling took the card, and murmured "Good night!" Then he glanced at the white square. It slipped from his hand, as his startled eyes read the legend:

MR. ROGER VAN VEEN



## CHAPTER XXI

### THE DISAPPEARING WIDOWER

WHEN Memling reached the studio he was covered with cold sweat and shaken with a chill. He had offered to sell Van Veen's stolen pictures to Van Veen himself. The man had acted like an ignoramus—but was he one? Van Veen had been shrewd enough to heap up a fortune of millions, to buy yachts, and houses, and house boats, and masterpieces. He could not be anybody's fool. Perhaps he had been shrewd enough to pretend ignorance of his stolen Terborgs and Van Mierises in order to gain a clue to them. His whole policy since the robbery had been one of hermetic secrecy.

Memling had gone to him with an amateurish story of a widow and a lot of valuable art works. Could a man of such intelligence have been duped? He would soon know. Van Veen knew Memling's name. He could learn more of him at the club. He could learn of his mysterious life, his invisible means of support. He could learn his address. Even if Memling kept away from Van Veen, Van Veen would undoubtedly hunt up—or hunt down—Memling.

The sculptor-thief cursed himself for a fool as well as a knave. In the face of exposure and shame the cleverness he had flattered himself upon turned sour on his stomach. He felt like the too ingenious lariat whirler who ties himself in his own rope. He thought of himself as one of those over-ingenious persons whom boys ridicule as a "smart Alec."



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## *The Disappearing Widower*

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He found his studio empty of people, but full of terrors. Of all times he wanted least to be alone now. He lighted every light. The glare frightened him more than the dark. He switched the lights all out again.

The bell rang, and his heart swung like an alarm in a belfry. He dared not go to the door lest he admit some gruff official who would say:

"Well, Mr. Memling, we've come for you."

He cowered in his easy-chair, his cigarette tremulous on his quivering lips. The doorknob turned, and he sat palsied. The incomer was only Nellie. Getting no answer to her ring, she had let herself in with her pass-key.

Hungry for company in his misery, Memling told her what he had done. She agreed that he was a fool—but a dear fool. She loved him all the more for this touch of human frailty. She had made so many mistakes herself that she had felt a certain awe of Memling and his infallible pose. It was good to have him human like herself.

The bell rang again, three longs and two shorts. It was Slinky's signal. He came in aglow with importance.

Nellie demanded: "Where you been that you're so gay?"

"To a cemetery," he answered, with a chuckle.

"A cemetery!"

"Two o' dem," he said, "and I've brung home de grandest batch of news ever. I've sold one of dem statutes."

"Which one?" said Memling eagerly.

"How do I know till you tell me?" he said. "It will need a little fixin' up, but you're a kind of a marble tailor, Mr. Memling. Didn't you toin a Revolutionary general into a statue of a female nymp'?"



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"What's the idea?" said Nellie. "What you drivin' at?"

"Well, you see, it's like dis. I got a frien' who is a dago marble cutter out at Lilac Ridge Cemetery on de Harlem Railroad. I goes to him and tells him I got a bunch of statutes dat ain't woikin', and has he any use for any nearly ready-to-wear monniments? He falls for it like a pound of lead. He says dey was a jempman who loses his wife last week, and lays her away on Lilac Ridge. He's all cut up and says he wants a monniment for his dear departed. He's a rich banker, and he said he'd pay ten t'ousand bones for an angel. Me frien' de dago pulls out a coupla handfuls of his Eytalian coils because he ain't got an angel or anyt'ing nearer one dan a coupla broken columns and a Gates Ajar.

"He tells Mr. Widderer, oh, yes, he knows where to lay hands on de swellest kind of angels. But when he comes to inquire, every angel any of his friends had had, had flew de coop. A few days later he meets de widderer, and de widderer says, 'Ain't you got me a angel yet? If I had a nice angel I'd go as high as eight t'ousand bones for it.'

"Me dago friend t'rows a fit and says he'll get one sure. But nary a piece of dat heavenly poultry can he find. Dey ain't a angel on de market. Just before I strikes Lilac Ridge he's talkin' to de banker, and de guy says: 'I must have a angel for me poor wife's monniment if it costs six t'ousand.'

"Me dago friend is use to widderers. Dey cool off so quick you can't holt 'em. Every day dey lop off a little more of deir unconsolableness. Says he to me, 'Slinky, you gotta ketch a widderer on de wing or you lose him!' He's cryin' when he says it. Every day he's bein' bereaved



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## *The Disappearing Widower*

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of anudder t'ousand. Dem widderers is kind of auctioneers upside down.

"He says to me: 'Slinky, if you loves me, get me a angel before dat widderer marries again.'

"I says, 'I'll get you one by retoin mail.' He says, 'Remember every day means anudder t'ousand bones out of our pockets.' So I takes de foist train back to town, and here I am. All we gotta do is to ship him one of dem angels and split whatever de widderer's grief is woit' by de time we land him."

He sank back exhausted with his oration and his gush of enthusiasm. Memling shook his head regretfully.

"It was a beautiful piece of work on your part, Herman, but unfortunately we haven't an angel in the shop."

"What!" cried Slinky. "Didn't I wrap up sumpum wit' wings on meself and help lug it to de van?"

"There was a winged figure, Herman, but it was a figure by Carpeaux entitled 'L'Allegro.' She has nothing on but wings and a very mischievous smile. She might suit the widower a few months later, but not now, Herman, not now."

Slinky tossed his hands in despair.

"Well, wat's dat udder marble female under de white rag?"

"That is a demure and proper lady, Herman, clothed in a long white robe. But she represents Cleopatra about to apply the serpent to her breast. It was one of Cleopatra's few proper moments."

"Well, den, I lay down," groaned Slinky. "What's de use? A hundred tons of marble round de joint and all dat widderer going to waste."

The three sat glum and even more depressed by the nearness of good fortune than if it had kept aloof.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Suddenly Nellie rose, went to the two statues, and drew aside the sheets that covered them. She studied them closely, then turned to Memling.

"Say, Doik, do wings ever come off?"

"Many saints have molted or lost theirs entire," said Memling. "In this sinful world wings, like halos, are excessively deciduous."

"I mean statues' wings?" said Nellie.

"Yes, the wings are often carved from a separate block of marble and mortised on the torso. But why do you ask?"

"I was thinking that if this pair of wings was plucked off this goil in the altogetther and pinned onto the shoulder blades of that Cleopatra dame—maybe, you'd have a kind of an angel that might pass in a crowd."

Slinky leaped to his feet.

Memling rose with more leisure. He walked round the statues, making measurements with his eye.

"Unfortunately Cleopatra is looking up with an expression of wild despair. There is a marble teardrop on her cheek."

"Couldn't that be toined into a look of heavenly resignation?"

"Soitanly!" cried Slinky. "And de teardrop is for de handsome husban' she's leavin' behind. It might flatter dat widderer into puttin' on an extra five hundred."

Memling smiled at Slinky's fanatic zeal.

"Unfortunately again, Cleopatra has a small and deadly serpent in her hand."

Slinky would not be rebuffed.

"Wit' a coupla swats wit' your chisel you could change dat soipent to a bunch of forget-me-nots, or a rosary, or sumpin."



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## *A Rehearsal for a New Role*

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"It might be done," said Memling.

"It's gotta be done," said Slinky. "And now dat I t'ink of it, after we pinch de plumes offen dat clothesless lady, I bet I can sell her to a frien' of mine who runs a Toikish bat'."

"You might bring me the stepladder, Herman," said Memling languidly. For once Slinky played the menial with enthusiasm. He brought the ladder, and Memling climbed it to make a careful inspection of Mademoiselle L'Allegro's shoulder blades. She did not blush. She did not look as if she had ever blushed.

"The lady's wings are false," said Memling. "She would look quite as well without them. It is not impossible to detach them and award them to the Cleopatra. She needs them. But it's a matter of some delicacy."

"It is a matter of some delicacy to get dat banker before his inconsolables runs out complete," said Slinky. "And now, if you'll excuse me, I'll telephone me dago friend to have his widderer here day after to-morrow."

"I should like a little longer," protested Memling.

"We can't afford it. Dat widderer is simply oozin' away at de rate of a t'ousand plunks every twenty-four hours."

## CHAPTER XXII

### A REHEARSAL FOR A NEW ROLE

TWO days later the transfer of wings had been effected and the marble dust from Cleopatra's shoulder blades swept from the floor. The "serpent of old Nile" looked almost astonished with her deadly asp changed to prayer beads, her suicidal grief for Antony



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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changed to a serene aspiration for a Christian heaven she had never heard of, and her amorous shoulder blades clothed with pinions.

The frivolous L'Allegro seemed to miss her wings no more than the rest of her costume, especially as she had been sold into slavery for five hundred dollars. She was making herself at home in the ladies' wing of a luxurious bath establishment, and there she smiled mockingly at the portly members of her own sex who enviously aspired and perspired toward her own proportions. Roger Van Veen is not likely to see his stolen L'Allegro, for he is not likely to be admitted, or to ask to be admitted, to that section of that establishment.

The bereaved banker came, saw, and was conquered by the apotheosized Cleopatra, and, as Slinky had predicted, the marble tear shed for Marc Antony had turned him into an easier mark.

He consented to pay four thousand dollars for her, but he was a banker, even in his weeds, and he insisted on paying only one thousand in cash, the rest in notes of various duration.

Memling regarded the notes with dread, for every day's delay in America imperiled his liberty. A bright idea flashed over him, however, and he asked the banker if he would honor his own notes by cashing them—at the usual discount.

And this the widower did—at a little better than the usual discount. Once a banker always a banker.

The Italian marble cutter had been browbeaten into accepting five hundred dollars for his share, and paying all the expenses of transporting the ex-Cleopatriated statue and setting her up on Lilac Ridge. He wept and cursed copiously, but finally yielded, and secretly con-



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## *A Rehearsal for a New Role*

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gratulated himself. He would be at no further expense than the cartage and erection of the statue. You can see her now, very much at home, if you visit Lilac Ridge. The widower has since remarried, but Cleopatra still revels in her new costume. Van Veen has never been there to see.

Once the deed was consummated, the consoled banker gone, and the marble cutter on his way back to Westchester, the three conspirators put the heap of money at the feet of the pseudo angel and danced in a wild circle round her.

The telephone bell cut the revel short. Memling said to Slinky: "You answer it, Herman, and say you're my secretary—no, with that dialect, you'd better be my chauffeur."

Slinky slumped from his height of pride, but obeyed, while Nellie and Memling listened.

"Hellow, hellow, well, what t'—hellow! Who iss it? Mr. Who? Mr. Van Bean—no, Veen—oh, yes. Well, Mr. Van Veen, whatcher want? Oh! Well, me master is upstairs in de—er—aquarium. What? Come closter to de 'phone. I'm de shofer, you kin speak plain to me." A long silence from Slinky. "Oh, all right. If you'll hold de wire I'll run up and tellum."

He set the receiver down and tiptoed to the corner where Memling and Nellie beckoned him.

"He says you promised to call him up, but you ain't done it. He got your address at de club and got your 'phone number from Inflammation, and he was expectin' to go to Europe, but, bein' kep' back by business, he wants to see dem pitchers before he takes de next boat."

Memling hesitated. He was mortally afraid of Van Veen, but success intoxicated him to dare anything.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"Well, I might as well brazen it out," he said, and with grim resolution went to the telephone.

"Oh, how are you, Mr. Van Veen! Oh, yes, I remember it perfectly. Very stupid of me. I've been exceedingly occupied. Not at all—yes, indeed. The pictures are at the home of Mrs. —, the widow I spoke of. Of course, you could see them. Well, her home is—er—perhaps you'd better come here. I'll have them at my studio—this afternoon? Very good!"

He glanced round and saw the hybrid angel still unremoved. It would never do to have Van Veen find her there. He turned back to the telephone.

"Oh, I forgot! My man reminds me that I have an engagement this afternoon. To-morrow, if you will. Good, to-morrow, then. Thank you. Yes, isn't it warm? Quite like summer. Oh, not at all. Good-by, Mr. Van Veen."

He rose from the telephone, and said to Slinky:

"You telephone your Italian friend that he must get this angel out of here before to-morrow noon, if he has to take her in a shawl strap. Nellie, you come here."

While Slinky pursued the marble cutter through the telephone Memling took his old model to a far corner, and said:

"Nellie, you've got to be a widow."

"Whose?"

"It doesn't matter much."

"I'd like to be your widow."

"Thanks!"

"I don't mean that, of course. I mean I'd like to have a chance to be your widow and then have you change your mind and not die."



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## *A Rehearsal for a New Role*

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"That's very nice of you, Nellie. I'm afraid I'd make a pretty bad sort of husband."

Nellie sighed to the depths of her poor little warped soul. So many things that other people had she could not hope to have. She blamed fate more than herself, and fate was the more at fault. It had started her wrong, and environed her wrong.

Memling looked at her sadly. She, with her crooked parentage and her mismanaged youth, had gone through nearly all wickedness, yet kept the kernel of her soul full of decent hopes and noble longings, in spite of all the evils she had suffered, the buffets she had had in the face.

He, with every advantage of birth, gentle breeding, lofty ideals, and high beginnings, had permitted one blow of man's injustice to twist him aside from his ambitions and corrupt everything in him to a craven cynicism. She was a good seed fallen on a rock and trampled and parched, forbidden to grow at all. He was a tree that had shot up straight, then bent under one storm till he pointed back to earth and grew gnarled, fruitless, hopeless.

He shook his head sadly and dismissed regret and remorse. They could always wait. He took up the more pressing business. "As I said, Nellie, you are to be a widow."

"All right," she answered, with a brave recovery. "What's my name?"

"You can have your pick. It's a privilege few women have had. Give me the telephone book." She handed him the bulky tome, and it fell open midway.

"How would you like to be Mrs. O'Dowd or O'Grady?"

"Come out of Ireland," she said.

"Well, here's Mrs. Obermeier or Mrs. Ottenheimer."



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"And don't jump to Jerusalem."

"Mrs. Palmieri or—here's a good one: Papavasilo-pulo."

"Whew! Gimme sumpum I can look and talk like—sumpum United Statesy."

"How's Patterson?"

"Sounds like New Joisey. Gimme sumpum more aristocratic."

"Mrs.—Van Benthuisen."

"That's grand!"

"I don't believe you could live up to it, Nellie. Besides, Van Veen is a Van himself. These Vans are very jealous of each other."

"Me father used to drive one once."

"Take shame to you, Nellie! How would you like to be Mrs. Vaughan?"

"That's not so wise."

"Or Mrs. Vernon?"

"That's simply supoib. Me for Mrs. Voinon."

"I'm afraid of your oi's, Nellie. We'll stick to Vaughan, Mrs. Nellie Vaughan."

"Nix on the Nellie. Consuelo Arabella for mine."

"All right! Consuelo Vaughan you are. Have you a black dress?"

"On'y that black sequin I wore last night to the theater."

"That's less like mourning than a red satin would look."

"Then I gotta get sumpum else. Have you got the price?"

"I have. Go out to-morrow morning and buy a full set of weeds that will look like real mourning."

"How much? Halfway in and halfway out?"



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## *A Rehearsal for a New Role*

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"Yes. Get something becoming. And now for a lesson in high art—say Terborg."

"Toiboig."

"Not a bit like it. Try again—Terborg."

"Turrburrgr."

"The 'r' should not sound like the slipping of a cog, neither should it be perverted into 'oi-oi.' Once more, and remember, you're supposed to be a lady of the upper, not the lower, East Side."

"Say, what kind of a guy was this I'm mournin' the loss of, anyway?"

"We'd better make sure of that now. And put it in writing, so that we'll agree."

They set to work to devise a past for the late Mr. Vaughan. Memling wanted to call him Percy—but since Nellie made it Poissy—he changed it to the safer and saner John. Even Nellie could not twist that.

Since Nellie knew little of the upper circles except what she had learned in studios, Memling made Mr. Vaughan an amateur artist of independent income, which he had lost in the late panic. In his travels in Holland he had picked up a number of masterpieces. Since Nellie knew nothing of Holland it was thought best to date this visit prior to her marriage.

Nellie's last question was a sudden:

"Say, who is goin' to be me chaperon?"

Memling thought of Nellie's readiness to go anywhere at any time. He smiled. She explained:

"I've gotta be respectable, ain't I? I can't come to your studio all by my lonesome."

"You can be my cousin," said Memling.

This seemed to satisfy every contingency, but Memling waited the ordeal of the morrow with all of a dra-



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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matist's first-night terror over the prosperity of a new play before a strange audience.

### CHAPTER XXIII

#### COALS TO NEWCASTLE

THE next morning Cleopatra, plus a pair of wings and minus one snake, went out of the studio feet first.

Early in the afternoon Memling received the second of Roger Van Veen's visiting cards. It was brought to him by Slinky, who was dressed like a footman, but said that he felt like something else. He did not mind the long tails of his coat, but he objected to his waistcoat. He disliked the omen of the stripes.

Nellie smothered her laughter at the sight of Slinky with a card on a tray, and made a dash for the back stairs. She was to slip out of the area gate, ring the front bell, and make a formal reappearance.

Memling's last word was, "Remember your pronunciations."

"I will," she whispered. "The guy's name is not Toiboig, but—Toiboig."

Memling threw up his hands in despair. He was sure that Nellie's dialect would ruin everything and probably land them all in the penitentiary. He had grown too much used to Nellie to realize that she had something besides illiteracy. She had the beauty of Aphrodite and the woman's wit of Lilith, though they meant nothing to her any more except in the service of her idolized Memling.

When Roger Van Veen was ushered in he brought



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## *Coals to Newcastle*

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with him Herbert Haslam! Memling was completely upset. He had never expected a double cross-fire. Between a shrewd millionaire and a cynical critic he was taken in enfilade indeed.

And somehow Memling, who had put aside nearly every other sense of shame, felt a horror of making use of a fellow clubman. It was bad enough that the transaction should have started in the sacred realm of his beloved Mummers; to dupe two members at once was getting desperately ungentlemanly. And Memling clung to the ideas of a gentlemanly behavior as a last shred of self-respect. But he was in for it, and there was no turning back.

Van Veen was more dapper than ever, his lips more like the edges of a watchcase, for he was about to buy something. His first words were—and he spoke with the authority of a purchaser:

“I’d like to make it plain at once, Mr. Memling, that I look at these pictures purely as a business transaction. The fact that they are for sale by a widow does not affect me in the least. My charities are taken care of by a special secretary. I hope you will not emphasize the fact that the pictures are the last property of a widow in distress.”

Memling hated him for the speech, but he managed to say:

“I shall not allude to it, Mr. Van Veen, further than to remind you that since she is a widow and in need of immediate money, the opportunity is double for a shrewd business man like you to pick up great bargains at your own figures.”

The thrust told. Van Veen glanced at the sculptor’s gentle face and saw no irony there. He took flattery from the insult, and his little eyes snapped. Memling hated



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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him more than ever, and it struck him as almost a noble task to fool this old miser, and a masterpiece of sportsmanship to sell him his own properties—make him a receiver of goods stolen from himself.

He led the way to the paintings, set up on easels or along a divan. And Van Veen scrutinized them closely with a pretense of knowledge that did not deceive a connoisseur.

He hissed: "Very nice. This one is very, very nice. And this one is very nice, too."

But Haslam went into unfettered raptures that his profession rarely permitted or justified.

"They're great! They're great! The texture of them—these Dutchmen got the texture of everything, silks, furs, leather, human hide, a 'cello, a chair—the texture of the sunlight itself—the texture of the very soul of everything. These canvases are small, but they're like little lenses; they focus a universe in a small space."

His hands were caressing them at a distance, and Memling's heart went out to him. He laid his hand on the critic's shoulder and said:

"I didn't know you had it in you to rise to masterpieces like these."

"I don't often get the chance," sighed Haslam. "The men who are painting to-day look pretty small, most of them, when you think of them through a perspective of a few hundred years."

Van Veen studied the critic closely, and tried to catch some of his enthusiasm. But while it was evident that he was ready to buy, his raptures were cold and cautious.

Still he was ready to buy, and Memling wished that he had kept Nellie out of it altogether. The bell rang



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## *Coals to Newcastle*

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and brought a cold sweat out on him. He was sure that she would make some ghastly slip with her "Toiboigs."

When Nellie came in, veiled, Van Veen drew himself up like an imitation of adamant. When she threw back her veil the adamant turned to jelly—wine jelly.

Memling himself was startled at the face that looked out from the black crape. Fright had whitened Nellie's skin. Fear of danger enlarged her eyes, and fear of herself gave her a halty speech that served excellently well for the fresh grief of a meek little saint.

It was wonderful how neatly she said what she said. Memling was amazed at the ingenuity with which she evaded the use of the words she could not say. She talked about Terborg, and her husband's love of his work, and never once used the crucial name. Memling winced every time she approached, but she never touched the reef, not once.

She pointed out to Van Veen the beauties of the pictures, but he could only see the beauties of the hands she pointed with. When she bade him look at the canvas he looked at her.

Memling, seeing that she paid no heed to the conquest, wanted to signal her in some way to take advantage of it. As if she had not seen her own success before he—or Van Veen—realized it!

But success inflamed even her, and she grew voluble. When little slips slipped in, Haslam, who could never lay off criticism, was alert for these, and Memling saw a little acid in his smile. He drew him aside to let Nellie have full sway with Van Veen.

Haslam went willingly. He said, when they were out of earshot:

"So this is your game, old boy?"



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"My game?" echoed Memling, as his heart stopped.

"No wonder you don't have to chop statues out of the hard rock, when you can turn your handsome studio into a confidential auction room for selling old masters to old millionaires with alleged widowlets as auctioneers."

Memling turned red with rage. "If you dare talk like that I'll kick you out of here, and your millionaire after you!" And he would have done it. He calmed himself enough to demand:

"Do you question the authenticity of those paintings?"

"Not at all," said Haslam uneasily, more convinced by Memling's wrath than by anything else. "But I am not convinced of your widow."

"Why not?"

"That dialect of hers. It's pretty thick when it slips in."

Memling paused. Then he shrugged his shoulders. "That's her own private affair, Haslam. Did you never hear of a pretty model marrying above her station?"

Haslam stared hard. "What a fool I am! Of course. I beg your pardon. Besides, it's none of my business. The one thing I'm here for is to make sure that the paintings are genuine."

"On my sacred honor as an artist, and a gentleman, I pledge you my belief that they are the work of Terborg and Van Mieris."

"I believe you. I'll tell Van Veen so."

"And when he has refurnished his empty walls at Ucayga you can write your catalogue, after all."

This shot was a bull's-eye. It rang the bell of Haslam's hungry soul. He was Memling's agent from then on.



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## *Love Comes in at the Door*

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As they drifted back they heard Van Veen saying to Nellie:

"You ought to have some one to protect you from the cruel world."

There was a senile greediness in the tone, and Memling wanted to throttle the millionaire. Then Van Veen murmured:

"The pictures seem to be thoroughly satisfactory, Mr. Memling. Thank you for letting me see them. I will discuss the terms with Mrs. Vaughan herself to-morrow."

And now Memling wanted to boot him out. But he bowed him out instead, though he loathed him so that he could hardly speak.

### CHAPTER XXIV

#### LOVE COMES IN AT THE DOOR

THE next day Memling waited in loneliness and impatience at the studio. Nellie had gone to see Van Veen. He had offered to come to her, but she had no place to receive him.

This time it was Memling that wanted her to have a chaperon. It was she that smiled.

"I guess I can take care of myself," she said, and added tenderly: "I'm awful glad you wanted me not to go alone. It makes me feel you care a little for me, after all. Good bye!"

Memling sat waiting in jealous discomfort. He had never felt a tinge of green for Nellie before. But now he feared for her in the power of the spidery old plutocrat. He paced the floor, the prey of a dozen worries, each contradicting each. He thought she would never return.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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But at last she reappeared. She had a reticule bulging with money.

"He offered me a check. But I made him send out and cash it. How much do you suppose he gave me?"

"About half what you asked?" growled Memling. "And took advantage of your being a widow."

Nellie laughed: "As the French say, 'Oh, contrary!' I took advantage of him. He offered me twice as much as I asked. There's forty thousand-dollar bills in that bag."

"Good Lord!" said Memling.

"Do you want to see it?"

"No!" he snarled, knocking the wealth aside, "I want you to look me in the eyes."

She looked up at him with the simplicity of an angel.

"What else did he have to say?"

"A lot."

"What was it?"

"Oh, it wouldn't interest you."

"Wouldn't it?" roared Memling. "I insist on knowing what the old scoundrel dared to say."

His jealous frenzy rejoiced her. She laughed aloud.

"Well, he dared a good deal. He dared to ask me to marry him."

"Don't take me for a fool," snapped Memling.

Nellie winced and flushed. "He had a lot to say about bein' crazy about me. But I wouldn't talk anything but Toiboig. He never noticed how I said it. He can't say it right himself. But I—he tried to kiss me, and I slapped his face for him. It did him a lot of good—and me, too. He liked me better for it. Then he apologized and tried to get in my good graces, by doubling what I asked for the paintings. I was all to the *Lady Macbeth* till he sent



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## *Love Comes in at the Door*

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out for the money. Then I said, 'Thanks very much. Good day!'

"But he put his hand on mine where it held the door-knob, and he played *Romeo* for fair. He said he was mad about me, and he'd be honored and overjoyed if I'd be his wife. Honestogawd he did. I nearly dropped dead."

"What did you tell him?" said Memling hoarsely.

"I told him I'd think it over. I said it was awful sudden, and—all the things I could think of out of the books. And then I made a getaway. He was white as a sheet, and he'd been cryin'."

Memling knotted his brows in amazement and meditation. The astounding outcome of the game overawed him. Nellie had not only sold Van Veen his own pictures for a great price, but she had won an offer of marriage from the infatuated dotard.

Ugly thoughts of selfish yellow flashed into Memling's heart. When the pictures were restored to Ucayga the watchman Beals might recognize them, or Haslam, in looking up their history, might trace their original sale to Van Veen. Exposure and pursuit, even to extradition, would hound them down.

But if Nellie married Van Veen nothing further mattered. The fear of ridicule would check everything, even if his love changed to horror.

The one wise, safe, crafty thing to do was to urge the marriage and hasten it. He put it to Nellie in another way.

"Nellie," he said, "it's a great chance for you. You've suffered all your life, and have known poverty, and shame, and hardship, and humiliation. You're in great danger now. If you should marry this man you would be rich



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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and safe—a great lady. Your beauty would win you a place in the highest circles. And your wealth would make you happy. Write to Van Veen and tell him yes. Marry him to-morrow.”

Nellie heard him through and looked him through in silence. She had been thinking all he thought. She had followed his course of reasoning across his wrinkled brow. His words did not deceive her. The selfishness of his inner motive shone through the altruism of his words.

That he would sacrifice her to such a union for his own safety's sake cut her to the quick of her soul. Her only answer was tears, a flood of tears and wrenching sobs. All that Memling could get her to say was:

“You don't love me! You don't love me!”

And Memling understood—understood her and the heart of her heart. He despised himself for giving such ugly thoughts a moment's lodging in his soul. He realized that below even the depth of infamy he had reached was an uglier infamy—to sell the woman who loved him to a loveless marriage.

Suddenly realizing that, after all, he had not sunk to the deepest deep, and that there was yet some wickedness that he could spurn, he exulted like one redeemed from the pit. He caught the sobbing girl in his arms and murmured:

“I didn't mean it, Nellie. I wouldn't let you marry anybody but me. Dry your dear eyes and we'll go to Italy on the first steamer that sails.”

She sat up and her tear-drenched cheeks rounded in a laugh of delight. And they began to plan their voyage to the new Old World.

But such plans of mice, and men, and maids gang aft aglee.



## CHAPTER XXV

## THE TALENTED OMNIBUS

**L**ISTEN at him! Ain't he supoib—simpluh supoib?" Nellie whispered, poising a forkload of salad before her exquisite lips, parted in an expression that was ambiguous between appetite and emotion.

"He plays very well," Memling assented somewhat stingily. Nellie thought she saw a trace of jealousy in his eyes. She hoped it was there, for the occasional hint of green gave her more belief in his love than any of the compliments he lavished on her in his complimentary moods.

She was ordinarily meek with him to the point of craven timidity, but to-night she was emboldened to venture a little farther, and see if she could fan that little green fume into a flame.

The humble, the all-enduring Nellie had been rapidly taking on self-respect. She had begun to realize how important she had been to Memling and his purse, not only in carrying out the Cinematographic Robbery, but in the more vital problem of selling the loot.

And now that Memling and she were to take the next steamer to Europe, where they could spend their fortune without looking over their shoulders in terror at every footstep, they were dining dangerously at one of the best cafés.

Almost any music would have pleased Nellie the triumphant, Nellie the rich, but the fiddler she found "su-



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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poib" was really playing extraordinarily well. And the final touch of glory was to have Memling wince when she praised another man. So she praised him some more.

Only a woman of Nellie's simple origin would try to express musical rapture and eat a Fontainebleau salad at the same time. But Nellie tried it.

As the melodious violin wept out its heart and sent its sobs through the restaurant, Nellie's eyes were veiled with a wonderful regret, and in deference to the music she chewed very slowly.

A more cultivated woman would have either postponed mastication or ignored the music, but Nellie looked solemn and chewed very slowly. The music was simply suppoib, but so was the Fontainebleau salad. The violin's voice had tears in it—but the salad had grape fruit and walnuts in it.

"It's divine—simpluh divine!" sighed Nellie.

"It isn't a bad salad," said Memling.

"I was allooding to the music, Doik," she said. She was calling him by his first name now.

The proved ability to make important money exerts a big effect on a human soul. It is almost impossible to be meek and a millionaire at the same time. Nellie was far from being a millionaire, but she had hoodwinked a millionaire, and that is even more deranging to humility.

So Nellie felt that she had a right a express a musical opinion, and if it made Memling jealous, she had a right to make him a little jealouser. Gawd knows how long and how croolly he had poiseouted her feelings, and even the woim will toin at last. So she continued:

"I wisht you'd ast the head waiter what toon that is. It just poimeates me very soul."

Perhaps she was overdoing it a bit, for to her keen



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## *The Talented Omnibus*

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disappointment Memling snapped his fingers at the head waiter. It frightened Nellie, for she was always afraid of head waiters. She would as soon have snapped her fingers at a dook or a belted oil. But the *maîtres d'hôtel* always came humbly enough when Memling signaled.

So now this portly personage came down the aisle bowing from afar like a ship on a ground swell. Besides, Memling had ordered wine, and his table was dignified by a silver pail with a gold-necked bottle anchored in the ice. Probably he was about to order another bottle, or at least a half bottle. So the head waiter came salaaming. He wilted a little as Memling said:

"You have a new violinist to-night, Pierre."

"Yes, monsieur, but only for to-night. I hope he doesn't annoy you? He is a substitute we picked up at the last minute. Our regular violinist is ill, monsieur."

"I don't care if he never comes back," hummed Nellie. "This lad is a poifect dream. I am pashnately fond of all kinds of music, but the violin is simple irresistless."

The head waiter looked down on Nellie, because he knew that, though she dined at times with the great sculptor, Mr. Dirk Memling, she was only his model. He said loftily:

"I'm sorry that mademoiselle does not like our regular violinist. He comes from the Conservatoire."

"I don't care if he comes from the Obsoivatoire," said Nellie spunkily. "He plays like a hoidy-goidy. But this lad has got that Belgian violinist—what's his name—Isaiah—on the run. He has coily hair, too, and it kind of goes with good fiddling—seems to help them emote when it gets in their eyes."

Even head waiters have some respect for themselves, though they have none for waiters. Pierre Bonpland felt



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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that he could afford to suppress Nellie now and for all time.

He brought up the final argument. With the haughtily humble shrug of an indignantly amiable head waiter he said:

"The man who is playing now is—well, to tell the truth, he is a waiter—and hardly that—only an omnibus."

"I don't care if he's a taxicab," Nellie persisted, bristling. "He knows how to toin a fiddle into a human soul."

The head waiter turned to Memling with a smile that said: "What fools these women be!" But Memling came to Nellie's defense.

"The fellow really plays with a good deal of temperament, Pierre."

This was different. Mr. Memling was a considerable customer; he must be agreed with.

"Monsieur is right. He has much temperament—for a waiter."

"For anybody," said Memling, with that icy calm of his that froze everything within reach. "Would you mind asking him what he is playing?"

"Certainly, at once, monsieur, by all means."

The head waiter sailed up to the platform and motioned the violinist. The poor fellow turned pale and bent low to hear his master's voice. He went on playing, but with a trembling bow.

He murmured an answer to the head waiter's whisper, and that bulky leviathan came bulging down the aisle again.

They are playing 'The Träumerei,' monsieur."

"'The Trowmery!' of course," cried Nellie. "I always loved Shopang."



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## *The Talented Omnibus*

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"In Germany they pronounce it Schumann," said Memling.

The violinist after that kept his big, lonesome eyes fastened on Memling's table. He played apologetically, as if to say: "Please forgive me if I upset you. I promise not to play my best again. I forgot."

And, after one piece more, he quit playing at all. The farewell number was a little popular musical-comedy tune, but he gave it so much grace and personality that it sounded better than it had any right to sound.

Nellie seemed to feel this, for she said:

"I bet that toon don't know itself the way he dresses it up. It prob'ly feels like I did when I saw that statue you made of me—the Dryad, you know."

"Hush!" said Memling. The Dryad was one of the saddest spots in his sad memory.

He sat dreaming of this lost treasure of his soul, bartered for a mess of pottage; but Nellie, who had been rather jealous of the Dryad, was watching the fiddler as he put away his resounding shell and left the platform.

Nellie and Memling were dining late, and the orchestra, weary of pulling the souls out of their instruments while a herd of people were stuffing their stomachs, was glad enough of a rest. The café would be practically empty till the after-theater supper crowd would flood it again. And then the orchestra would resume the task of casting its pearls before lobster ransackers and Welsh-rabbit hunters.

The substitute violinist was coming down the aisle. He would pass their table. Nellie had found him useful as a prod for Memling's drowsy jealousy. She could not afford to waste him. But she hardly dared to speak to him on her own account.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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She reached out and, seizing Memling's wrist, startled him out of his sculptural reverie:

"Say, Doik, here comes that omnibus violinist. Slip him a kind word, there's a dear."

With rather grudging consent Memling put up his hand to detain the passer-by. The poor fellow had paced those aisles so often as a valet to the waiters that he instinctively paused in a garçon-like pose, as much as to say:

"A fork? A spoon? Another napkin? Yes, sir; yes, sir."

To his amazement, Memling said:

"I wanted to compliment you on your music. It was charming."

The fellow was so startled that he fell back on his native tongue.

*"Ach, danke schön! Vielen Dank! Grossen Dank!"*

And Nellie had to add: "You play a violin something supoib."

The poor fellow was so flustered that if he had had in his hands his usual trayload of soiled dishes, he would certainly have let them fall with *éclat*. He continued to repeat his thanks, unable either to go or to stay. "I was afeart I did disteerb you."

"Distoib us!" gasped Nellie. "I should say you did! But it was our emotions you distoibed." Then, seeing him uncertain what to do, she said: "Sit down, won't you?"

He was too deeply confused to disobey, and, when he realized what he had done, he was so petrified that he could not get up. His shuttling eyes caught a look of chagrin on Memling's face, and then on the head waiter's face a suffusion that threatened apoplexy. Pierre hur-



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## *A Violinless Violinist*

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ried from the room. The ruling passion is strong in waiters, and he felt that if he must have epilepsy, he must not annoy the guests with it.

### CHAPTER XXVI

#### A VIOLINLESS VIOLINIST

**M**EMLING had been somewhat taken aback by finding himself at table with one of the waiters, and he saw the other waiters staring surreptitiously his way. But he had too much pride to show his discomfort publicly, and he decided to make a virtue of necessity. With the invisible condescension of a Kaiser greeting a plain ex-President, he said:

“Pierre tells me that violin playing is not your—your regular occupation.”

Nellie felt a snobbish implication, and she gasped:

“Doik!” But the fidgety fiddler said:

“It iss not now it, but once it wass it. I am a diploma from the Leipzig Conservatorioom, and I have as contsertmeister in great orchester oft gespielt. From Deutschland I have the contserttour in England gemacht, und in Sheffielt I am for zwei years directink my own symphonie orchester. So much success have I hadded dat all the peebles say you should by Americah come. So I take me a schiff und here am I come. But I am not much of a saving man, und when I am landed, I have in the pocket small money. But I says soon I get me a nice yop——”

“A nice what?” said Nellie.

“Yop—is it not a yop I should say?”

“Oh, soitan’y, excuse me,” Nellie murmured. “I un-



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derstand. It's the old story. Uncle Sam is the greatest confidence operator in the business. You thought you'd find a million-dollar tree growing at the water's edge, and—you didn't."

"I deedn't it—no," said the violinist, with almost a smile. "The contsert manachers say they cannot get me the contserts till I have the——"

"I know," said Nellie; "they told you what Corbett told Fitzsimmons: 'Go git a reputation.'"

"Ja wohl, you have it! So I say, I must in an orchester a place get. But every orchester is fool up already. Then I am told, you must belong by the Musical Union. So I go by the Musical Union. There a man says: 'You cannot belong by us till you have in Americah sechs monaten gebleiben.'"

"I don't quite get that 'gebleiben,'" said Nellie.

"I must live here seex mont's. Aber how can I live here seex mont's if I cannot live at all? I try to get me a yop. But I cannot anywhere a yop get."

"How on oith did you keep from starving?" said Nellie, her face woeful with sympathy.

"I deed not keep from it. I deed it. When I am owing so much money by my boarding house dat I cannot have any more my room, and cannot get me my trunk away, I sleep on the park benshes—me and my violine. One day when I get pretty hungry, I fall off the bensh where I am sitting, in Medison Skvare."

"Medicine Square?" said Nellie. "I thought I knew my New York, but Medicine Square is a new one on me."

"Don't you know it, Medicine Skvare? Vere iss de Medicine Skvare Garten und Feeft' Evvenoo crosses Broatvay?"

"Oh, yes, I'm hep," said Nellie, winking a moist eye



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at Memling. "You was so hungry you fell off the bench. Ain't it awful, Doik? But go on."

"A policemen says I am drunk and gives me a hot foot vit his club."

"Ain't that New York!" Nellie mumbled. "When in doubt call it a drunk. That's the motto. Go on."

"So I tell my violine '*Auf wiederseh'n*,' und leave her by a pawnings shop. It is like sellink my own baby."

Nellie saw through a fog of tears that this had gone home to Memling. He knew what it was to sell his Dryad. His dark eyes were glistening, and he was violently scratching designs on the tablecloth with his thumb nail. The violinist went on:

"After I am pawn my soul, my voice, my all, I have a little money for a little vile—not much, versteh'n-Sie, aber—a little. The man gives me not half I paid for the violine. Finally I get a yop as a porter in a hotel. But I am not trained in the Conservatorioom for carrying trunks, and the feerst beeg box breaks for me my back. Then they give me yop to vash the deeshes in thees restaurant.

"By and by I am promoted. I can carry the deeshes. I am omniboos like you see me. Me who lest year am directink the beautiful symphonies, I am now vaitink on the waiters! Life is a funny place—yes?"

Nellie agreed solemnly: "Life is—well, you know, Doik, what General Shoiman said about war." She turned again to the musician. "But how on oith did you come to play up on the platform there?"

He smiled. "Oh, one day, in the morning, I am sweeping out the café, and nobody is here, and I see the violinist's box, and I take a peep inside, so I shall not forget how a violine looks it. I see her lying there like a



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baby who sleeps in a cradle, and I pick her up and my fingers ache so I pick up also the bow. I look round, nobody is anywhere. I shut my eyes and put the violine under my cheen and draw the bow over the strinks very soft.

“Und it iss like I am heepnotized, for I don’t remember something more at all, till I hear peebles applowdink and I open my eyes und dere is all de waiters vit deir mout’s und ears open, und Pierre—Herr Bonpland—he comes by me and says: ‘You play pretty good, don’t you?’ und I say: ‘I am great artiste,’ und he makes a leffink und says: ‘See how good a toon you can play it vit de broom on de floor.’

“So I come down from de pletform und goes back to de omniboos. But aftervarts, one day at night, de violinist is not come, he is seeck, so Pierre says: ‘You get up and get busy vit de fiddle some more.’ And again to-night it comes not the violinist, und again I climb up to Paradies und forget I am only a omniboos. It is not nice to be a musiker und have a soul, but no violine.”

He dropped his chin on his breast in token of the completion of his story and the completeness of his despair.

Nellie’s eyes rested on his dejected curls as if her hand caressed them, and she sighed like an Antigone bewailing the bitterness of fate in a phrase of Sophocles’ best Greek:

“My Gawd, can you beat it?”

To hear her say it, one might have thought that it was her first vision of the world’s cruelty. In the face of other people’s troubles, Nellie always forgot that she had ever had any of her own. She had gone through greater tragedies and lost more than the hopeless violinist.

Memling was brooding over the violinist, too, and



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over himself. He felt a certain close kinship with the waiter. Memling had begun life with a flash of glory as a sculptor, had won a great commission, only to fall into bankruptcy and futility through the graft of politicians, who raided a State treasury.

But Memling had not become a waiter. He was too proud for that; so he became a thief. By dint of caution and good luck, he had heretofore kept his own name and fame clear of suspicion, and he went about as an honorable, an honored personage. But the heart within him was ashamed and afraid, forever afraid.

He looked at the disconsolate violinist and envied him, felt that he himself was in a worse plight. The ruin of the musician's career had been as dire and unmerited as his own, but the violinist's shame was public. The post of omnibus was humble, but it was honest. People would blush to have him sit at their tables in his jacket, but what would they have done if Memling had sat there in the stripes he had earned?

Memling resolved within himself that the violinist was the luckier of the two. He had no need of shivering at every unexpected footfall or touch, lest it be a policeman's.

Nellie was in as great danger as Memling, but she had room in her heart for more pity. That was where they differed. Furthermore, it was Memling's nature to run away from a painful strain on his sympathy. He was sorry for the fiddler, but it hurt him so to be sorry for anybody else that he was put to flight.

Perhaps, too, he was not entirely comfortable over that look of mothering tenderness with which Nellie anointed the curls of the wretched fiddler. He grew restless, and said with some hint of a prior engagement:



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"I'm afraid we must go now."

Instantly the violinist was on his feet, and once more an omnibus.

"Excoose me for to keep you. I make your kellner to come quick."

He was up and away, and Nellie could see that the snobbish waiter "coised" the presumptuous omnibus under his breath. And the waiter treated Memling with so much disdain that Memling noticed it and threw him one of his most harpoonish glances. When the change was brought he dallied with the tip while the agonized waiter bustled frantically—helping Nellie on with her light wrap and keeping one wild eye on that longed-for coin. During this punitive torture, the violinist went by with a tray loaded to the gunwales with used dishes.

"I wonder if I ought to tip him, too," Memling said. He may have been innocent of any malice, but Nellie bristled.

"If you dare insult him, I'll never speak to you, Doik. He's as poifect a gempman as you are."

"I hope so!" said Memling meekly enough.

As they rose, Nellie suddenly spoke: "Lend me your pencil, will you?" She sat down quickly, tore off a piece of the menu card, and scrawled on it a few lines. The omnibus was just making his return trip with an empty tray big as a Spartan shield.

Nellie stopped him and put out her hand. He stared at it, then seized it, bent to kiss it, remembered what and where he was, and straightened up like a soldier.

Nellie threw such a glance into Memling that he obediently put out his hand, too. He was ashamed to be seen shaking hands with a waiter, and he was more ashamed of being ashamed. But thief as he was, and



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unworthy of anybody's tolerance as he felt himself, he was a gentleman by breeding and instinct, and he blushed like a spanked schoolboy as he made his way past the gaping waiters, and took his hat and stick from the gaping checkroom boy.

Pierre Bonpland had evidently escaped his apoplectic stroke, but he was ostentatiously busy in the farthest corner, and did not bow Memling out as usual.

Once in the street, Memling vented his spleen on Nellie, as usual.

"What did you mean by making me shake hands with that waiter?"

"I thought it would do the both of you good," said Nellie.

Memling swallowed that insult, though it went down hard, but he returned to the attack.

"And what note was that you slipped into his hand?"

"That's my poissonal affair," said Nellie, listening anxiously. To her delight the shot told, and he rounded on her furiously.

"Do you mean to say that you dare to flirt with a waiter in my presence?"

A ripple of blissful laughter poured from her throat, and she hugged Memling's elbow tight.

"Don't fret, Doik, I ain't starting anything. I wouldn't floit with anybody but you."

"Then what was the note you gave him?"

"Oh, that was nothing but the address of your studio—and an invite to call."

"Well, I'll be——"

"Oh, no, you won't. I'm goin' to try to help that poor dawg—if it's the last act of my life. I wisht we



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hadn't 'a' had to leave him to the moicy of that awful head waiter."

"What are you going to do?"

Nellie risked another poisoned dart.

"I want to hear him play."

Memling evaded with:

"But he has no violin."

"I'm goin' to get his fiddle out of hock for him."

"You're not."

"I am. I guess I oined my money. I got a right to spend it, ain't I?"

There was no answering this, so Memling sulked all the way, which put Nellie into the seventh heaven of a woman's delight.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### 'TWIXT FIDDLEDUM AND FIDDLEDEE

THE studio was a harrowing sight next day. It showed all the ravages of removal. The great windows stripped of their hangings were glaring and stark, the walls were naked of pictures, and blank squares of raw color fought with the sun-toned tints of the general scheme.

The floor, denuded of rugs, was bleak with packing cases like blocks of driftwood in a backwater of litter. The chairs were inhospitable in hempen overalls.

Nellie and Memling and his man Friday, Herman Green, known to the police as "Slinky," were pottering about in dismal weariness and disgust, all of them anxious to be aboard ship before the police discovered their



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## *'Twixt Fiddledum and Fiddledee*

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guilt. And they were afraid, too, lest other thieves break in and rob them.

Suddenly the bell rang—and rang with startling sharpness in the unmuffled rooms. The three thieves stopped short, frozen with anxiousness, statues of terror. The bell rang again. Memling just managed to be strong enough to say to Slinky:

“Herman, you may go to the door.”

The little pickpocket made a pitiful grimace of timid protest.

“It’s always ‘Let Hoiman do it,’ when anyt’ing unpleasant’s gotta be did. Whilst de bulls is nabbin’ me, you can beat it over de back fence.”

Memling swallowed hard and said:

“Of course, if you’re afraid——”

“Who’s afraid?” said Slinky, as he moved off in knock-kneed palsy.

He came back with the ashes of fright on his face.

“Well, here dey are. It’s a detectuff in disguise.”

“Are you sure?” said Memling, too scared to run.

“Sure it’s a disguise. He’s got a old frock coat on and a wig dat come off a scarecrow.”

“We c-can’t run away from one lonely guy.”

“We can’t all go streaking over the back fence,” said Nellie. “Let’s invite him in and swat him with something?”

That seemed an excellent idea. Memling told Slinky to get the lead pipe in the stocking, and take his stand behind the door, while Nellie opened it. When all was ready, she swung the door ajar and beckoned.

In walked a curious figure. Just as he was passing under the sword of Slinkycles, Nellie gave a cry, and threw up her hands. Not knowing how else to make sure



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of Slinky, she fell back against him and squeezed him into the crevice behind the door, while she said:

"I didn't reco'nize you at foist." Then she called to Memling, who had lingered at a discreet distance: "Oh, Doik, it's Mr.—Mr.—it's the omnibus."

The violinist shrank a little at this label, and Nellie made haste to explain: "You see, I don't know your name." She gave him her hand, and this time he kissed it.

"My name," he said, "is Eugen Berlepsch."

"Come again, please."

"Eugen," he said in his German way.

"Oikane," was the best she could mimic it.

"Berlepsch," he added, and "Boilepsh" she made it. Then she introduced him to Memling. The introduction was well needed, too, for there was no resemblance between the white-shirted, short-jacketed, aproned waiter and the musician in the obsolete frock coat and the fuzzy silk hat. Clothes do make the man, and he was as musicianly now as he had been waitery before.

Slinky remained half smothered behind the door until he had a chance to enter the studio, be introduced on his own account, and affect surprise at the presence of a visitor whose visit he had nearly ended before it was begun.

Memling apologized for the condition of his studio, and then flushed at having apologized to a waiter for anything. But, after the first shyness had worn off, Herr Berlepsch forgot that he had ever been anything but the polished artist.

There was a piano in the studio, a rented piano waiting for the owner to call and remove it. Nellie, raising the front fall, soon had Berlepsch ensconced on a stool running his fingers over the keys.



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"I play piano like a violinist," he apologized, with a little laugh, but his audience was not too musical to be impressed by the harmonies he drew forth; and the bare walls and floors were to the piano's advantage.

"To think of that Musical Union toining you out to starve!" said Nellie. "How long you gotta wait before your time's up?"

"I am already eligibility now two weeks," said Berlepsch, "aber I have not yet the money for my dues."

Nellie offered to pay it. Now the artist blushed a fiercer scarlet than ever. To have a strange woman buy him into the union was too dire an humiliation to endure. Then Nellie, by sundry violent eye signals and gestures, finally made Memling understand what was needed. When at length he translated her sign language, he did the handsome thing handsomely.

"If Herr Berlepsch will do me the honor of accepting the money as a loan," he said, "it can be repaid at his convenience."

This was a trifle better, but pride was still opposing profit when Nellie bore down on Berlepsch with all her wiles, and before he knew it he had consented to "borrow" Memling's money purely as a favor to her.

This served as a modulation to the real cause of his invitation to call.

"You can't do much in that union without your violin, can you, Hair Boilap?"

He shook his head dolefully. Nellie went on: "Mr. Memling wants to lend you money enough to get it out of soak—er, away from your uncle—don't you, Doik?"

Doik didn't know that he did, but he meekly insisted that there was nothing he was so eager to redeem as Herr Berlepsch's violin.



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This was the occasion for another spasm of blushing. The violinist twisted his long fiddle-wise fingers.

"Ach, ich unglücklicher!" he wailed. "I did eat up the pawning money for my violine before I find me a yop; und one day I see a vindow vit a sign, who says 'Pawn Tickets Purchased.' I am so hungry and veak, I did sell the ticket. Better I had died before I did it, but I was so near dyink, I was not mineself."

Nellie shook her head in sympathetic misery. Even Memling understood the fellow's double shame and regret.

"Was it a nice violin?" was all Nellie could find to say.

"Ach Himmel, she was a true Cremona."

"Maybe, Cremona would make you another," said Nellie.

As gently as he could, Herr Berlepsch explained that Cremona was a city and that the art of the luthier had long lost its glory there.

"My violine," he wailed, "she was made by the great Josef Guarnerius. He call himself 'del Gesù' because he is so divine. He make her when he was in prison. The jailer's daughter she brings him the wood."

"Just like a woman," said Nellie.

"It's what you'd have done," said Memling, and she almost perished with delight at the unusualness of praise from him.

"The violinen he makes in the chail are not so fine as which he makes in his shop, but Josef del Gesù could not make a bad violine any more as Herr Memlink you could make a bad statue."

Memling looked rather unconvinced by this outrageously unjustified compliment. But Berlepsch squared himself by explaining:



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"I have not the pleasure had to see any of Herr Memlink's statues, but I know that nobody who is by a fellow artiste so kind und so filled up vit Gemüthlichkeit could be unkind to even a piece of marble."

He went on to say that his violin showed the hand of the master even with inferior woman-selected wood, and its value was not great as great violins go. Still it was a del Gesù and it had sung him into success.

With the violin pawned and the ticket sold months ago, the situation had no ray of encouragement. But Memling could always find a way out of a tangle, when he wanted to set his mind to it, and he was soon beckoning Nellie out into the hall. She made her excuses and left Berlepsch at the piano with Slinky, trying to entertain him by asking him if he could play "That Yiddisher Rag."

Memling closed the door after Nellie, and said:

"You keep that crazy fiddler here, and I'll go buy him a violin myself."

"But you wouldn't know a good violin if you was hit over the head with it."

"Oh, that's all poppycock," said Memling. "He ought to be glad to get any kind of an instrument. One violin's as good as another to such a man. I'll pick up a cheap one over on Fourth Avenue. I doubt if he is much of an artist, and I don't think he'll ever know the difference."

"That's mighty white of you, Doik. What makes you so kind to the poor dog all of a sudden?"

"I'll do anything to get him off your nerves," he said gruffly. His resentment gave her strange satisfaction again, and she kissed him au revoir.

She returned to the studio and lost herself in the rap-



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tures of a true musician's improvisation. He ran from one thing to another, merging little German folk songs, and themes from great sonatas with wild fantasies of his own.

Watching his fingers and his soul in full flight, she had no idea of time, and Memling's long-delayed return struck her as amazingly prompt. He carried a shining new violin case, with a brand-new fiddle nesting in it, and a bow alongside. In the taxicab he had made up a pretty speech such as Memling alone could manage when he tried. He begged Berlepsch to accept the violin as a slight keepsake, and to honor them by christening it at once.

Berlepsch, all gratitude and delight, gazed at the violin as a father at his first born in its nurse's arms. He paused, and a look of shock seemed to freeze him, as if he were not entirely pleased with what he saw. Then, with hungrily clutching fingers, he caught the instrument from the case, tightened the bow with a few twists, gave a few little thumping plucks, and drew his bow across the strings.

Even Nellie and Slinky were disappointed by the squeak that resulted. On the violinist's face came a look of intense distress. But he mastered it, and, forcing a very bad imitation of pleasure, proceeded to play, pausing now and then to reresin the bow, and take a new grip on himself and the smile that would not stay on.

It was evident to all three auditors that the violin was an execrable patchwork made to sell, and that the tormented artist was trying not to hurt the feelings of the misguided Samaritans who had bought it for him.

At last he gave up in despair. Cold sweat was bead-



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ing his knotted forehead, and his smile was such as an undertaker fastens on a helpless corpse.

Memling confessed: "It's a pretty bad instrument, isn't it?"

Nellie groaned: "It's rotten."

But the victim of the gift murmured: "It—it takes the time to—to make a violine mellow. I give you one t'ousand t'anks. It is beautiful, and you are most kind. And now I must go once. You are mos' busy, and they are needing me by the café."

He was so eager to be gone with his disappointment and his embarrassment that they could not hold him, and after many more thanks and good wishes and farewell bows, they let him escape.

"I didn't know there was so much difference in fiddles," said Memling guiltily.

"There's a lot of difference in sculptors, isn't there?" said Nellie. "You can tell a Mike Angelo from a John Rogers quick enough, can't you?"

"But that's marble," said Memling.

"And this is music," said Nellie. "And now poor Hair Burlap is woise off than when we foist met him. He's got a bum fiddle and a broken heart."

She was inconsolable, but she could see no way out of the dilemma. There were myriads of tasks to be done before they sailed, and their tickets were bought for the day after the morrow.



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### CHAPTER XXVIII

#### A RAID ON THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

BY the next noon the studio was cleared of everything. Even the piano was away. The trunks for hold and cabin had gone, and there remained only the hand baggage to be taken to the dock in the taxicab that carried their uneasy souls to the pier the next morning.

Memling foresaw a long absence from his native country, which he had done so little to adorn and so much to disturb. He planned to begin sculpture seriously anew in some obscure corner of Europe.

He was impelled to take a last look at the art treasures in the Metropolitan Museum. He did not know when he should see them again, and he knew that the galleries contained numbers of old masterpieces which Europe mourned for, unconsolated by the high prices with which our millionaires had bribed their foreign owners.

It was like a little introduction to the old world to go there, and to his artistic soul it was a sort of religious pilgrimage.

He dragged Nellie along, though he warned her to be cautious of her opinions, for he knew that she was often Philistine and always outspoken.

"I don't think I could sincerely love any woman who held plebeian views of art," he said. "So to be safe, be silent."

At the entrance he was compelled to leave his walking stick, though he assured the attendant that he had



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no intention of poking holes in the canvases or whacking off the fingers and toes of the statues.

In the entrance gallery he would not linger to study the examples of modern sculpture. He was hard to please, and he wanted to begin at the paintings on the floor above, then work down to the statuary, ending up with the casts from the revered classics.

So Nellie, weary with the labor of packing, toiled up the long stairway. At the head, various vistas enticed them. Memling was for a room full of paintings. Nellie voted for a room full of porcelains.

So they separated by mutual consent. He neither knew nor cared for any wares but marble, bronze, and canvas, and she, though she loved beautiful things, exhausted them—or herself—at a glance. She could not understand what kept Memling staring at one picture or one statue for an hour or more, making curious little groping gestures all the while.

She read masterpieces as she read newspapers, skimming the headlines and skipping the editorials.

Similarly Memling hardly expended a glance on the laces, chinas, and jewelries over which Nellie could hang in breathless suspense for an age.

She moved slowly from case to case, decoyed farther and farther. Before she knew it, she was confronted with the collection of musical instruments.

Music had taken on a new, a more personal interest since yesterday, and she forgot table ware for soul ware. She roved through a wilderness of curious devices for shocking the atmosphere. Nearly every imaginable sound-producing contrivance of mankind was shown, from the tall and tunable drum, the Aztec huehuetl, to the carved and frescoed piano of present luxury.



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There were the pan's pipes of Grecian shepherds, the tangled trumpets of Wagner, gypsy dulcimers, Elizabethan spinets, Bible regals that folded up into a book, lutes, theorbos, Russian balalaikas, Irish harps, bagpipes, oboes, bassoons, viole d'amore and di gamba, simple Welsh fiddles with the appalling-looking name of "crwth"—everything, it seemed, that could make a noise for those who blow through brass, breathe through silver, pull a string, hammer on wires, thump a sheepskin, or rub a catgut the right way.

And so she came to the group of violins, examples of the master designers' art, the Amati, the Stradivari, the Guarneri, Bergonzi, Maggini, Vuillaume, Lûpot, Stainer, Hill—all those names which to the violin collector are as the apostles to a priest.

Nellie could think only of her discovery, the forlorn genius disguised as an omnibus. She ran through the galleries hunting Memling till she found him poring over a painting by Cimabue, in which Nellie could see nothing but bad drawing. She haled him away, and pointed to the imprisoned violins.

"Look at 'em!" she gasped, "hanging there like dead boids in a hunter's game bag. They're just bustin' wide open with music, and nobody can touch 'em. Ain't it a shame? I ask you, ain't it?"

"Why, it's like cutting out the tongue of a canary," she ran on, "or puttin' a gag on Caruso. Talk about old Roger Van Veen's sound-proof sleeping apartment. We stuffed one watchman into it for a while. If they was to lock Melbar, and Tetraseeny, and Plongson, and Paderooski, and Kubelik, and—I don't know who all—in that room for life, it wouldn't be any wiser than what you see here.



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"Think of it! Violins locked up in a case. Pictures and statues—yes; they talk sign language, but you can't have a voiceless singer. It's just like committing moider to keep these song boids shut up. And that poor Hair Boilap going about without a single fiddle he can lay hands on, and here they got silent fiddles to boin."

"I thought you were leading up to that omnibus," said Memling peevishly. "Can't a woman ever generalize? I can understand why you object to making deaf mutes out of great musical instruments, but would you ever have thought of it if you hadn't taken a fancy to that waiter?"

"Maybe I would and maybe I wouldn't," said Nellie. "But I can't see that generalizin' ever did anybody any good woith doing. The thing is that a grand artist hasn't got a violin to play on, and I'm going to get busy right here."

"Why—what do you mean?" Memling gasped, his horror showing that he knew well enough.

"You know as well as I do," she said. "I'm not going to leave this country without leaving poor Boilap a decent fiddle, and here's where I pluck one right off the fiddle tree."

"Are you crazy?" Memling gasped. "Don't you know the place is guarded?"

"All I gotta do," Nellie persisted stubbornly, "is to run this di'mond ring of mine round the glass, when nobody's looking, lift out the fiddle, and scoot."

"Yes, and just about the time the glass cracks, a guard will walk along, see the empty space, and catch you before you get to the head of the stairs. Then our trip to Europe subsides into a jaunt up the river as guests of the State."

"I guess I got another think comin'," said Nellie



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weakly. She stood pondering furiously a few minutes. Then she said:

"I'll be back here in half an hour or so. You can browse around that long and then meet me over by that majolica dream—and don't you fail to be there when I arrive back."

She had pointed out the rendezvous and was hurrying away before Memling could check her to rebuke her for ordering him about. The meek and lowly Nellie was certainly growing up.

The appointed hour did not bring Nellie to the majolica tryst. Memling fumed and worried, imagining everything appalling. At last she appeared, walking with a limp—walking with a crutch!

He flew to her aid, and assisted her to a bench.

"What in Heaven's name has happened! Did you get hit by a taxi—or what?"

"What." She smiled, glowing with joy to see how anxious he was in her behalf. In a subdued voice she raced through an explanation, chewing gum madly the while.

"When you said they'd miss the violin as soon as we swiped it, I saw at once you was right. I says, we gotta have a substitute. So I hurry out, pick up a taxi, and tell the driver to take me down Thoid Avenue and stop at the foist toy shop. We jogged along under the El for a million miles. Finally we strike a big store. I says 'Wait.' In I fly, find my way to the musical instruments, and right before my eyes is a lovely violin marked down to four dollars and ninety-eight cents—*was* five dollars and ten cents. I could see it was like the one you palmed off on poor Hair Boilap—fair of face, but false of heart. 'Wrap it up,' I says.



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## *A Raid on the Metropolitan Museum*

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The lady-like sales gent says, 'Will you have a nice case?' 'No, thanks,' I says. 'Nor a nice bow?' he says. 'Nor a nice bow,' I says. 'Just wrap it up, and step lively, or I'll be late to my vawdville toin across the street.' Then I go down to the artificial-limb department and get me a crutch.

"Then I scoot for the street, jump into my taxi, and here I am back again."

Memling broke in. "But the crutch—your accident—what was it?"

Nellie wrestled with a laughter that would have startled the whole museum.

"You're slow to-day, Doik. When we came in, they made you pass over your cane, didn't they? I knew they'd hold up a violin, for fear I'd try to give a concert to the mummies. A violin is a thing you can't palm, or tuck up your sleeve, or hide in your hat. So that's why I limp. I've got a fiddle for a shin guard. With these hobble skoits us women have to wear, I had to have an excuse. So I carry the crutch, and people very politely look away when I limp—not to hoit my feelings."

Now that his uneasiness was set at rest, he could afford to make a protest.

"Will you please quit chewing gum? You know I abominate it. Why do you do it?"

"I need it in my business," she said. Then she outlined her campaign, and aroused in him enough of the joy of thievery to end his reluctance.

He took her left arm, and with the crutch under her right, she hunched her way into the violin room and sank on a bench near her prey.

There were few visitors in the museum because it was one of the days when a small admission is charged, but



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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a group of rurals insisted on discussing the violins and lingering till Nellie was tempted to brain them with her crutch. Before they went, others came and went. But at last there was a lull in the sluggish stream.

One uniformed guard lingered. Nellie gave a gasp and her head fell back weakly, her hand beat the air. Memling ran to the guard, forced a coin in his not unwilling hand, and begged him to bring a drink of water. He hurried out, and instantly Nellie was as busy as a cabinet medium at a scientific investigation.

She bent down swiftly, whipped up her skirts, disclosing a violin fastened to the inner side of her calf with a piece of wrapping cord and a garter. She got the fiddle free without delay, and slipped it under a light shawl she carried on her arm.

Meanwhile Memling was leaning over a glass case containing a violin which a card described as a Stradivari, on which Paganini had played. Memling seemed to be studying the instrument's exquisite contours and its venerably dim luster.

Actually he was cutting away the glass with a diamond.

Before the plate was quite released, another guard sauntered in with maddening deliberation. Any moment the first would return with the water. Memling cast a glance at Nellie, and, advancing to the guard, said he wanted to ask a question about an old clavichord. He led the man briskly to the remotest corner available.

The lame woman rose, reached the glass case in an instant, completed the operation on the glass, raised one edge gently, slipped her hand in, lifted out the ancient prisoner, laid it on the glass, took from her shawl the \$4.98 fiddle, lowered it into the room made sacred by the





"She got the fiddle free without delay"







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## *A Raid on the Metropolitan Museum*

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Stradivari, removed a surprising quantity of chewing gum from her mouth, affixed it to the glass at the corners, set the glass in place, and fell back to the bench, with her shawl partly covering the Stradivari, glanced round huntedly, bent, whipped up her skirts, slipped the scroll of the violin's head through her garter, made a few hasty loops with the cord, tied a speedy knot, and was sitting up in a flutter of real and feigned excitement when the guard came back with the glass of water. She drank it with gusto, for her mouth was parched with the fever of danger. She thanked the guard so much and asked him to call her brother—Mr. Warburton.

Memling thanked his decoy for his information, tipped the guard who went for the water, tipped him liberally but not ostentatiously, and gathered up his weak sister, who went slowly with her crutch, followed by the sympathetic glances of the guards, who agreed that it was "too bad so purty a lady should be so lame."

A taxicab took them to the Hotel Astor. They dismissed the man, entered at the Forty-fifth Street entrance, and left at the Forty-fourth Street exit. A second taxicab took them to the studio. Nellie limped into the house, and achieved a miraculous recovery, throwing away her crutch, and producing a Stradivari violin from nowhere.

She was insanely impatient to see her Hair Burlap and dazzle him with a genuine Strad, not made in prison, but escaped from prison.

She would listen to nothing but dining at the café where he wore yet a while the livery of servitude. So Memling took her there, grumbling mightily against the trouble and the danger and the jealousy this weak little omnibus had led him through.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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The head waiter was distantly courteous and informed them that the omnibus had been given his notice. He had asked for the dinner hour off, as he had to see some theater orchestra leader about something. He had promised to be at work at eleven when the after-theater tide set in as usual.

All that Nellie could arrange was that the head waiter should tell the omnibus Hair Burlap to come without fail to Mrs. Memling's studio at eight the next morning. They sailed at ten.

At eight the next morning the swallows were all made ready to fly. The studio was an empty shell, already rented by the landlord who had never known from what revenue his rent had been more or less regularly paid—and might not ever know how the next tenant earned his income.

It was nine o'clock when Berlepsch was made out strolling down the street. The message had come to him at second hand and had reached him all awry. It took him some time to make his explanations in his courtly and laborious English and to say that he had been admitted to the Musical Union and secured a post in a theater orchestra.

Then Nellie, who would not be balked of her ceremony, made a little speech, which was almost as much of a surprise to Memling as to Berlepsch.

"Mein Hair—ahem!—ahem!" she began. "Day before yesterday Mr. Memling as a little joke on you made you a present of a cheap fiddle. You behaved like a poifect gent and a true sport. But all the while Mr. Memling had up his sleeve a little surprise. The last time he was in Europe he was gave a very nice violin by a soittain party who said it was made by a very good



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## *A Raid on the Metropolitan Museum*

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violinist. He wasn't sure just who sawed it out and pasted it together, but he thought it was a real nice violin, and would sound swell in the hands of the right party, and here it is, and a nice new bow we bought yesterday."

Herr Berlepsch quivered. He had been shocked once. Why not again? He took from Nellie's hand the violin, and prepared for more polite lies.

His eyes widened as he gazed. His head bent closer. His hands recognized the blood royal of that varnish, that prince of the house of Cremona, something about the individuality, the uniqueness of wood and purfling, sound holes, balance, ratio—all the things that make an autograph recognizable.

The first tribute from his silent awe was his quick search for a label. He had not looked for the label of the first one Memling gave him. He found none on the second, for Memling had carefully removed this little legend:

ANTONIUS STRADIVARIUS CREMONENSIS  
FACIEBAT ANNO 1704.

It was fascinating to watch the omnibus fondling that violin. He seemed too awe-struck to assail it with a bow.

By and by he gently thumbed the strings, reverently tightened them into tune. He hesitated with the bow for a long while. Then with a smile of beatific oblivion, he raised the violin to his cheek, closed his eyes, poised his bow, and drew one long deep tone from the G string. It had the sonorous moan of a human soul, a man's soul in despair.

Then he gave voice to the E string, and it was a woman's voice, clear and vibrant, honey sweet. Then he



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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evoked a rich four-toned chord; tested the harmonics, and found them eerily fluty.

His fingers stopped the strings as if at random, and his bow wandered at will, tunelessly yet with fascination.

For a long time he experimented. Once more he had forgotten that listeners existed. But they stared with eyes and ears. It was a new thing in their world—to see a starved music-soul feasting.

And finally he began to play—melodies that seemed to be dug out of the very deeps of sorrow, and others that seemed to leap into the very core of heavenly beatitude.

He played on and on in a frenzy, a chaos of all moods, griefs, rhapsodies, tragedies, buffooneries, songs, and speeches.

At last he opened his wet eyes and saw his audience one triple stare. He wanted to be afraid and ashamed and to apologize. But Memling alone could speak, and he could only say:

“Wonderful!” But he threw a look of profound approval and applause to Nellie.

Nellie concealed her hysterical longing to cry very hard and laugh very hard at the same time, by a casual question:

“Have you any idea who made that violin?”

“*Ach ja! Ja gewiss!*”

“Who?”

“Der Herr Gott.”

Nellie whispered to Memling: “And to think they’d put us in jail if they knew we set that fiddle free. I think they’d ought to hang the man that put it in a cage.”

Then they woke to the fact that they were supposed



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## *The Boat-missers*

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to be on their way to the steamer. Everything was forgotten in a frantic desire to be aboard, a harrowing fear of being too late. The handclasps with the violinist were mere clutches and escapes; the farewells hasty words flung backward. The taxicab, flying like the wind, seemed to crawl; everything that could get in the way got in the way.

As their frantic chariot slewed round a corner into West Street, the two thieves within caught a glimpse of the steamer they had hoped to catch. It was already in midstream, already being urged seaward by a gang of tough little tugs as busy as a tribe of ants navigating a paralyzed caterpillar.

The people on the docks were still yelling "Bong Voyadge!" but the people on the decks were mere handkerchiefs waving "Aw revawr!" Distance was mercifully softening the blare of the steamer band, made up of peevish musicians, who must shortly lay off their bravery and revert to stewardship, mere bed making, and the rushing of first aid to the seasick.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE BOAT-MISSERS

AS Memling recognized the steamer by her funnels and her long, low lines, he tried to mask his appalling disappointment. All he said to Nellie was:

"Well, there goes our ocean greyhound."

And all Nellie said was:

"Greyhound? It's built more like a dachshund."

With the obstinacy of human nature, the taxi driver



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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went on to his empty destination, sped down the rumbling pier to the hauled-in gangway, and, stopping short, with a spine-cracking jolt, turned to apologize.

"I'm sorry, boss. I done me best."

"It wasn't your fault, shofure," said Nellie. "That was a fine boist of speed you made."

"A fine burst of speed," echoed Memling, "and got us here half an hour too late for the steamer."

"And a couple of days too oily for the next one," said Nellie.

They descended, and glared grappling hooks at the vanishing leviathan. If wishes were aëroplanes, they would have started in pursuit.

"We could make it in two jumps," Nellie quoted, with a sickly pluck.

Already the homegoing greeters were straggling back, grinning at the manifest plight of the taxicab bulging with steamer rugs and hand luggage, flaunting the name of the departed boat.

Finally, Nellie said: "Well, I guess we gotta crawl into the taxi again, and go back home."

"Go where?" Memling snorted. "Home? Have you forgotten that we've rented the studio?"

"That's so," sighed Nellie. "No place to go but out!"

The sight of that taxicab was intolerable to Memling. He could not endure the humiliation of going to a hotel with such a blatant advertisement of the boat-misser's luck. He arranged to have his things stored in the parcel room on the pier, and dismissed the driver with a mournful tip.

"Whatta we going to do now?" said Nellie.

"We'll take a walk and talk it over."

"We got time for quite a stroll," smiled Nellie, and she jogged along at Memling's elbow. Both were silent



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## *The Boat-missers*

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about the great fear that possessed them. The loss of their passage money was unimportant, for, as Nellie said, they "had so much dough it was a boiden to tote their poises."

But time was more than money. A peculiar irony seemed to have played with their plans.

A bit of ill-timed generosity had led them to rescue the violinless violinist from his despair. Out of gratitude, he had wished to play them a few strains on the glorious instrument. And their harmonious souls had lingered to listen. Surely a purer motive could never have beguiled two hearts. But sarcastic fate had chosen this very sweetness of their natures to betray them withal.

Both Nellie and Memling realized this, and repented their temporary aberration into the dangerous realm of human kindliness.

"It's all my fault, Doik," she sighed. "It was the only decent toin I ever did anybody, and it didn't woik."

"I always said," Memling admitted, "that a good thief must stick strictly to business."

"You was right, Doik; once a boiglar, always a boiglar. Sumpum told me we'd never get that boat."

"And something tells me," said Memling, "that we'll never get the next one."

"We gotta get it," said Nellie. "Every day we spend in this boig is dangerous. Maybe we'd better go over to Joisey City, and stay till the next boat goes."

"To stay in Jersey City would be suspicious in itself," said Memling. "We'd better talk of something else."

"That's right. It's getting on me noives."

By now they had left the pier and were picking their way across the atrocious pavement of New York's water



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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front. Memling turned back to cast a resentful glance at the scene of their discomfiture.

“Look at that dock—at all those docks!” he growled. “They’re nothing more nor less than a row of enormous woodsheds. The approach to a city like this ought to be majestic. It ought to prepare the visitor for a world capital. The departing voyager ought to carry away a memory of nobility. New York is a wonderful city, but her water front would disgrace Cripple Creek.”

“What would you put there—a regular Luna Park?”

“There ought to be great plazas and colonnades and towers,” Memling answered. “The day is past for building tin barns like those. Look at the new railroad stations—they’re handsome as Greek temples. The ocean lines ought to do even better. Now, if I had my way, I’d make the companies put up a marble structure there, with a proper approach, with columns and a few statues. Gad, it would be just the place for that pediment group I began in Italy when I was a gentleman and an artist. I’ve got money enough now to quit stealing. If I can only get away from here, I’ll go to Italy and try to find my poor lost statues again. To be honest once more—and a sculptor once more—ah, if it could only be!”

“It’s gotta be, Doik,” Nellie vowed tenderly. “You’ll never have to pull off another job in your life. It costs a lot to be honest; but, thank the good Lord, your last stunt was a wholesale clean-up, and you can afford to retire. You’ve gotta begin sculpting again, Doik. You make all the other marble-cutters look like thoity cents. What’s Patrick Angelo to you, or John Goojon? And as for that Frenchman, Rodang—you can do better with one hand tied behind you.”

“Thanks, Nellie; but we’d better not paint our Easter



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## *The Great Van Veen Again*

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eggs before they are laid. As a child, I was taught that if you told what you wished, you didn't get your wish. Let's talk of something else. Let's talk of a façade of that ghastly dock. It's a howling disgrace."

At this artistic instant, Memling felt an unseen hand pounce on his shoulder, and heard a gruff voice:

"Dirk Memling, I arrest you!"

His heart stopped, and the blood seemed to evaporate from his body. His knees hardly upheld him till he could turn his head; and then his chalky face almost touched the face of—of Roger Van Veen himself.

### CHAPTER XXX

#### THE GREAT VAN VEEN AGAIN

SO absorbed had the sculptor and his model been in their real thoughts and their superficial comments that they had not heard or heeded the approach of a soft-gliding automobile. The chauffeur, seeing them standing fast, did not sound his horn, but was about to pass them, when Van Veen prodded him, and motioned him to stop. He came to a halt almost on Memling's heels, and old Van Veen, leaning out of the car, listened a moment, then clapped his hand on Memling's shoulder, and spoke in as near an approach to a policemanly profundo as he could manage.

If Memling and Nellie had been a trifle less petrified with the uncanny suddenness of their victim's apparition, they would have fled in opposite directions at once. But before they could make a step, Van Veen's face was pur-



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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pling with laughter. He was writhing and hissing senile cachination:

"Oh-oh-ho! That was beautiful! I had you scared that time. He-he-he, but you actually turned pa-ha-hale. It was the best jo-ho-hoke I ever saw-haw-haw. Oh-oh-ho, you turned positively gree-he-he-heen!"

He was asphyxiated with laughter, and blinded with gleeful tears. Nellie and Memling had abundant leisure to recover their wits and exchange glances that sang hallelujahs of relief. They could hardly believe that this old plutocrat, who could see through the jungles and meshes of Wall Street finance, could be fooled twice by two plain thieves; that he could stand and gibe innocently at them, like an April fool, while their pockets bulged with his money.

But there he was, guileless, gullible, and gulled, laughing himself toward apoplexy.

"I hope he chokes," Nellie whispered to Memling. But by the time the old dotard had wiped his eyes and his misty glasses, and resumed control of his emotions, they had regained control of theirs. They were ready to fence with him for their lives and liberties.

They waited for him to speak. His first words were:

"Which way are you bound? Get in and I'll drop you there."

For lack of inspiration, Memling fell back on the truth as a last desperate resort.

"We aren't going anywhere. We have no place to go."

He explained the plan for a trip to Europe, the surrender of the studio, which another artist had snapped up, the missing of the steamer, and their embarrassment.



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## *The Great Van Veen Again*

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A look of suspicion crossed Van Veen's face, and Nellie read it at once. She remembered that Memling had introduced her to Van Veen as the widow of an imaginary artist and art collector named Vaughan.

She drew a long face and said, trying mightily to remember to avoid her East Side dialect:

"When you paid me so liberal—ly for those pitchers—pict-ures that my poor husband collected, I decided to go back to Europe, where I could be near the places where we was—were so happy together."

"Where you and Memling were so happy together?" Van Veen interrupted, with quick jealousy.

"Oh, no. I was referring to my poor Henry."

"I thought his first name was John, Mrs. Vaughan."

"That was his foist—his first name, but he used to have one before that. He dropped it, you know—like artists often do. But I often called him Henry."

"I see," said Van Veen. "But Memling——"

"He's my cousin, you know."

"No, I didn't know."

"Didn't you? Oh, yes; he's always been my cousin. He thought he ought to go over to Europe and get into the atmosphere. You know, there's so little atmosphere in this town that artists gets asphyxiated. So I advised him to go abroad, and we were taking the same steamer. He was kind enough to wait for me, and I'm always late, so I missed his boat for 'um—for him."

Old Van Veen seemed partly satisfied and greatly relieved. He said with sudden briskness:

"Ah, I have just the idea. Since you two outcasts are alone and homeless in New York, suppose you take pity on me, and go out to Claremont for luncheon with me?"



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Memling and Nellie ransacked their souls for some excuse. But even while they were rummaging for previous engagements, Van Veen had hoisted them into his car, and had given his driver instructions to lay the course due north.

The two thieves felt like prisoners. Memling thought of the tumbrels that carted aristocrats to the guillotine. Nellie thought of nothing more picturesque than the patrol wagon.

Both wanted to leap out and run. Both were afraid to budge. Terror robbed them of all pleasure in the situation, but Memling's pride moved him to say:

"We go on one condition, Mr. Van Veen: that you allow me to be host at luncheon. You furnish the transportation, I furnish the fodder."

Millionaires are so constantly standing treat, and so rarely treated, that they seize an invitation with the hunger of street Arabs.

Van Veen did not debate the point. He cried:

"Delighted!"

Memling's pride was flattered only a moment, for he realized that he would be paying for Van Veen's food with Van Veen's money. Van Veen would be standing treat, after all.

This would have amused Memling once, but now he was so converted to the hope of a new and blameless life that the success of his deception merely sickened him.

And then Van Veen scared him again—for, after all, the bravest thief must inevitably be as timorous as a rabbit. The capitalist's face took on a sudden scowl. "And now I want to ask you a very serious question, Mr. Memling: What conspiracy have you been planning against me and my money?"



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## *The Great Van Veen Again*

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"Conspiracy?" Memling echoed feebly.

"Yes. What are you planning to do with my property?"

"Your property?" And again he could only play the parrot.

"My docks! I'm one of the owners of the pier you were criticizing. What's the matter with our docks?"

"Nothing—they're quite all right."

"But before I played detective and put my hand on your shoulder, in good old Third Avenue melodrama style, I eavesdropped for a moment."

Memling and Nellie died again. How much had the old fox overheard? He did not keep them in a long suspense.

"I heard you say my ghastly docks were a howling disgrace."

This was not terrifying, but it was embarrassing. Thus cornered, Memling could not deny his treason. He attempted to make the most of it.

"Well, you see, Mr. Van Veen, we artists and you business men have different points of view. When you put up a dock or a depot, you think mainly of capacity and economy. We artists think of the effect of the landscape. It would be so splendid if the water front of New York were worthy of the great city, and the glorious river, and the big ocean, and the world's attention. New York is becoming a real capital, but I don't think those sheds of yours do us justice."

Van Veen seemed to be impressed. He said meekly: "Well, doctor, what would you prescribe in their place?"

"Architecture."

"But we can't afford architecture."



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"The first company to house its dock in a real building would be more than repaid."

"He's right," said Nellie, "there's no press agent like a swell front."

This gave the financier pause. "I never thought of that. There may be something in it."

Memling outlined his scheme a little further, and Nellie suggested:

"Tell him about your impediment group."

"It's too painful," said Memling.

"Then I'll tell him," she said. But at this moment the car whirled them up to the Claremont steps, and their thoughts were busied with the ordering of the lunch. The feast began with cocktails, and went along the gamut with completeness. Memling was host, and he hoped to stupefy his prey with food.

"I wish I'd brought along some knock-out drops," Nellie whispered to him, as Van Veen turned to shake hands with a passing acquaintance.

When the ceremony of ordering the feast was ended, Van Veen paid no heed to what the advertisements called "the lordly Hudson, queen of rivers." He fixed his eyes on Nellie with admiration.

"You are looking extremely well, Mrs. Vaughan. I'm glad you missed your boat. It's an ill wind, you know."

But Nellie was in no mood for flirtation. "I was going to tell you," she said, "about Cousin Doik's—Dirk's impediment group."

"Oh, yes," said Van Veen, "but just what is an impediment group—one of those things that prevents you from seeing anything?"

Nellie was floundering, but Memling intervened.



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## *The Great Van Veen Again*

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"You misunderstood Mrs. Vaughan," he said. "She did not say impediment, but pediment."

"Oh, excuse me," said Van Veen, with a confused idea that his ears must be failing. Then Memling explained, rather for Nellie's assistance than for Van Veen's.

"You know that in a classic building like a temple or a capitol, above the row of columns there is usually a long, low triangle made by the apex of the roof. They call that space the pediment, and often they fill it with a group of statues, the ones in the corners lying down, and the others rising gradually to the tall central figure."

"Oh, yes; quite so," said Van Veen. "I think I have noticed something of the sort on the Stock Exchange. And you made one of those—er—pediment groups, you say?"

"Yes," Nellie broke in. "It was several years back. You see, one of the State governments was building a new capitol building. The artshitect decided to have one of those pediment things, and they had a prize comp'tition. Doik, my cousin here, win the prize, and goes to Italy to do the woik—work. He had about elevum of the statues nearly finished, and he had a gang of Eyetalian stone-choppers to help him. After he'd run himself up the pole for several thousand bones, along comes a new district attoiney, one of those trouble-making snoopers, who wants a receipt for everything. He gets wise to the politicians grafting something terrible, so he holds up the woik on the job, and railroads half a dozen State senators and contractors and things into the penitentiary.

"They got their desoits, I suppose, and there'd ought to be more politicians and less boiglars in striped pajamas; but the one that got hoit the woist was the inno-



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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cent party—as per usual. Poor Mr. Memling, chopping away in Italy, gets word that his statues won't be needed. He's spoiled all that marble, and he owes everybody in sight, expecting to pay the costs out of the check he's going to pull down from the State. But the State treasurer cables him 'Nothin' doin'. Knock off work and get home the best you know how.'

"He pays his workmen every cent he has, and leaves his marbles where they stand, and returns home in the steerage, with nothing in his pockets but a broken heart, and a ruined life. That's what comes of being the only honest man on a job."

Van Veen was so fascinated by Nellie's beauty that he overlooked her solecisms—he had understood that she had originally been the model of the late lamented Vaughan. And the old capitalist was so fascinated by her voice that he came as near being touched with pity as his little stock ticker of a heart could attain. Where another would have shed tears, or groaned, or at least mustered a sigh, he managed only to click his tongue with a sympathetic "ts-ts-ts!" But for him that was what a spasm of sobs would be to a more emotional temperament.

Nellie little realized how profoundly she had affected him—for him—and she wanted to wring his neck for his coldness. But she said nothing. He thought for some time, and cleaned up his pilaff of chicken livers with the thoroughness that marked most of his dealings. Then he was ready to speak, but even now he was cautious. He addressed himself always to Nellie, trying to curry favor with her.

"As I understand it, Mrs. Vaughan, your idea is that my transatlantic company should tear down its sheet-iron docks, put up a handsome—er—temple of transportation,



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## *The Great Van Veen Again*

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and use for its decoration your cousin's pediment group. Do I get you?"

"You get the idea," said Nellie, who could be cautious, too.

"And you think that Mr. Memling could find his statuary again?"

Memling broke in. "I imagine so. I hope so. Unless the blocks of marble have been used for other purposes." The bare thought of this sent a knife through him.

Now Van Veen found himself on his own ground of dollars and cents.

"And how much do you estimate that all this would cost?"

"I've never figured it out," said Memling. "I haven't the faintest notion."

"I see," said Van Veen. "We might make a rough computation, if you would care to take the time. The scheme interests me. I may say that it interests me greatly! Let's adjourn somewhere where we can have a good talk. My town house is closed up, and I'm living at one of the clubs while my country house is being made ready. Rather nice place I have up in Ucayga. I wish you could see it. Some nice works of art there—not so many as I had before those damned thieves—you'll pardon me, I hope, but you see a gang of crooks, pretending to wield a cinematograph, looted my place."

Nellie choked a little on her expression of horrified sympathy, and Memling gulped some wine to oil his tongue, before he could even say: "You don't mean it."

"I do mean it," said Van Veen. "The villains thought they were very clever, but my detectives are close after them. We'll have them all in a day or two, they say."



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Memling tried to mumble "I hope so," but it was hard enough to look it.

Van Veen, fortunately, shifted the subject.

"But let's talk of pleasanter things. As I was saying, I have no place to take you. What if I came to you? Have you decided where you intend to stop till the next boat?"

The only name that Memling could think of was "The Waldorf," so he said that. Van Veen looked at him with amusement.

"You artists certainly take good care of yourselves. I couldn't afford to put up there myself. But, if you agree, we'll all go to the Waldorf, and we can figure it out there. If it looks feasible, you can go on abroad in your steamer and begin the search at once. Our time is very short."

Memling was so exalted by this undreamed-of prospect that the Waldorf seemed none too extravagant a place to draw up the protocol. He assented heartily, and Van Veen rose.

"Good! If you'll excuse me, I'll go telephone my office that I'll not be down this afternoon."

And he was gone. Memling's hopes went with him.

"He'll never come out of that booth alive. He'll have apoplexy, I know. Oh, if God would only let me get back on my feet, and become an artist, I'd turn out a masterpiece that would atone for all I've done. If I could only finish my group, I'd accept the penitentiary or the electric chair without a complaint."

Nellie did not answer. Nellie was praying. Seated there among the frivolous, she had bent her pretty head, and clasped her hands in petition.

The Van Veen they had so feared to meet, so longed



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## *The Great Van Veen Again*

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to escape, was suddenly become their anchor, their mainstay.

Memling's cynicism snuffed out his brief candle flare of hope. Ignoring Nellie's closed eyes, he maundered:

"It won't work, Nellie; it won't. It's too beautiful to be possible. We've fooled Van Veen so far, but we'll reach the limit any minute now. No man builds up a fortune from nothing, as Van Veen has done, without being terribly wise and terribly merciless. He may make a few mistakes, but he won't keep on blundering. No fool could have accomplished what Van Veen has done."

From the depths of her prayer, Nellie whispered: "He's an old man, now."

"Yes, but not too old to dominate a hundred rivals. He's a powerful man, Nellie—he's crooked, but on a big scale. I'm afraid of him. He'll get us yet, Nellie. Some little word, or look, or slip, and we'll give ourselves away. Then he'll see it all at a glance, and he'll come down on us like a thousand of bricks."

"Like a thousand of cream puffs," Nellie sniffed, irritated at being interrupted in her upward thoughts.

But Memling fretted on: "He's soft with you, Nellie, because you're pretty, and he's lost his head over you; but, once he learns how you've tricked him, he'll crush you like a June bug. He's a merciless fighter. He gives no quarter in Wall Street. He's pursued big rivals to absolute bankruptcy, and I've heard that a widow's tears only make him a little meaner."

Nellie unclasped her hands in despair. "Gee, I can't slip a prayer in edgewise. Don't get stage fright now, Doik, for moicy's sake. We got the grandest little chance that ever came our way; don't play the quitter now."



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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She lifted her eyes to him, and they were full of bravery. He took courage from them, but even as he stared into them, he saw her glance across the room, and blench with sudden terror. She clutched his arm, and gasped:

“For Gawd’s sake!”

“What’s up now, Nellie?”

“We gotta get out of here this minute.”

“What do you see—that watchman, Beals?”

“Woise than that. Look round, careful, and pipe what’s sitting at a table up against a champagne bucket.”

Memling turned cautiously, and made out a figure that was entrancing the tittering waiters. It was as if a tramp had stolen the clothes of a rich bather, put them on, regardless of misfit, found money in the pockets, and resolved to squander it in one magnificent outing. Memling recognized him at a glance as one of the members of the gang with whose dubious assistance he had carried out the robbery of the Van Veen estate.

He was lolling in a ridiculous imitation of majesty, over an array of dishes that would have taxed the capacity of a Roman emperor.

In one hand he gripped, at the same time, a wavering champagne glass and a cigar of that huge size curiously called a “fairy tale,” though “cat-tail” would be more appropriate.

“It’s only Gold-tooth Lesher,” Memling smiled to Nellie. But she was in a panic.

“Yes, but he’s drunk, and dressed up. If he sees us he’ll come over; and if he opens his mouth, he’ll jam both feet in it. We gotta fade, and fade quick.”



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## *"Gold-tooth" Lesher Again*

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### CHAPTER XXXI

#### "GOLD-TOOTH" LESHER AGAIN

MEMLING had learned to respect Nellie's intuition of danger, and he realized the menace of their toothless and brainless old crony. But he realized, also, the other horn of the dilemma.

"We can't run away and leave Van Veen in the telephone booth," he said. But Nellie would not delay.

"We'll wait for him outside. Slip the waiter his money, and tell him to tell the old man we're on the steps."

Memling began to partake of Nellie's panic. He beckoned the waiter, shoved him a bill at least twice too large, told him to keep the change, and apprise Mr. Van Veen where his friends were waiting for him.

As they scurried to the door, Van Veen appeared, saw them, and, to Nellie's delight, hastened after them, looking interrogation points.

"I got a little faint in there," Nellie explained.

Memling had already signaled the motor car, which was fortunately at hand, and dashed up without delay. Nellie and Memling leaped in, and Van Veen followed, calling to the chauffeur:

"The Waldorf."

Just at that moment Nellie saw Gold-tooth Lesher at the head of the stairs. He had descried them, and followed in haste. His mouth was too full for utterance, but he waved a fork at her, and then took his napkin from under his chin to shake it as a signal of distress.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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But Van Veen did not see him, and Nellie did not mention him, except to heaven, in a prayer of thanks.

When the whizzing car reached the Waldorf, Memling registered his own name and Mrs. John Vaughan's. He asked for a drawing-room suite for Mrs. Vaughan. Seeing the great Van Veen in her company, the room clerk gave them an apartment ordinarily occupied by visiting princes and Chinese wearers of the peacock feather.

As they had no baggage to bestow, they were soon gathered about a table, discussing what would be a proper sum to keep Memling in artistic comfort, to trace and repurchase his marbles, or other blocks of appropriate size; to pay off the debts that had been gathering moss and interest in Italy; and to carry his work to completion.

Van Veen was plainly trying to make an impression on Nellie. Once before, he had so lost his head that he had proposed marriage to her. Judging that his best play was to show a certain flippancy with large amounts of money, the old satyr promised himself a financial indiscretion.

When, then, Memling would murmur: "My living expenses in Italy would be, say—well, I could manage on two hundred a month," Van Veen would say:

"Call it three hundred," and look at Nellie to see if he had scored.

When Memling would protest:

"But I have no right to trespass on your generosity," Van Veen would giggle:

"Oh, I'll make it up by shaving the next dividend down that much," or "When I'm a financier, I'm a financier; when I'm playing Mæcenas, I can't afford to haggle."



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## “Gold-tooth” Lesher Again

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And then he would look at Nellie, and cold chills would run up and down her back, while Memling turned green with a jealous desire to throw the old he-goat down the air shaft.

But they were restrained by the feeling that even this brief humiliation was better than the long suffering of a penitentiary repentance, and they kept silent. Memling could not entirely resist the heavenly urge of a temptation to believe that perhaps, after all, their uncanny luck would hold out till he had actually retrieved his beloved statuary and had once more tasted the rapture of beating off the marble husks from the beautiful forms he had visioned.

And then there was a knock on the door, a loathsome rat-tat-tat, as from mushy knuckles, and before they could say “Come in,” or “Stay out,” the door was opened stealthily, in a sneak-thievish way, and Gold-tooth Lesher’s mug leered through the crack, the light flashing back from that lone and gilded incisor which gave him his nickname and his personal dialect.

When Nellie saw Gold-tooth’s ugly head surveying the scene, like *Mephistopheles* in *Gretchen’s* garden, her womanly intuition instantly advised her to rush to the door, take the intruder by the throat, shove him into the hall, and there scare him away, or throttle him to death. The alternative could have been decided in the hall, and she could have found some explanation to appease Van Veen’s curiosity.

But her reason told her to pause and think it over. When a woman stops to think, she is lost. She ceases to be the inspired sex, and becomes an inferior imitation of the plodding male.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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### CHAPTER XXXII

#### THE BOMB EXPLODES

NELLIE never forgave herself for wasting that precious moment in cogitation. She glanced at Memling, and he had turned to wood; he had no more initiative than a cigar Indian wearing a smile made with a chisel.

Before she could speak, the stage was Gold-tooth's. With all the aristocracy of intention unwonted champagne could give a man of the training and nature of a tramp, he stalked in, waved a wobbly hand, and proceeded to speak in his own peculiar way, his usual looseness of tongue being further liquefied by his potations:

"Greetingsh, kind friensh! I sheen youse two up at the Claremont reshtaurant, and I tried to pash the time of day sochable; but youse wash making a break for your benzshine ambulansh, and youse gimme the shlip. But when this old geezher here"—he rested his hand and his unstable weight on the shoulder of the astounded Van Veen—"when I heard him shing out to the shoffeer, 'The Waldorf,' I follered you ash fasht as possible on the shubway.

"The gazhabo at the deshkh downstairs didn't want to lemme up, but I told him I was Mr. Memling'sh coashman, and he gimme thish number. I told him he needn't telephone, as youse wash exspectin' me. Purty good, ain't I?

"I never had no difficulty gettin' into a housh I shet my heart on, day or night, and I washn't goin' to let any



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## *The Bomb Explodes*

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narrow-shested hotel shambermaid keep me out. Sho here I am, and zhusht in time. Whash the good word? Whash new zhob you're framin' up? Who ish thish old party? I ain't sheen him before, have I?"

Van Veen's first instinct was a mechanical reaction. He was rather finicky in his attire, and he sat brushing off the place where Gold-tooth's unmanicured hand had rested. Otherwise he was as stupefied as Memling and Nellie.

The fatalism that is at once the support and the despair of a thief, had nullified their faculties. Nellie felt the suffocation of doom in the air, and she simply grinned helplessly, and muttered to Memling:

"This seems to be our busy day."

Otherwise, Gold-tooth's appearance was received with complete silence. He had expected some applause, at least, and he broke out with alcoholic querulousness:

"Whyn't you shay shomeshing? Whyn't you tell me what you shink of my glad raghsh? Are you as zheal-oush ash all that? Nifty, ain't they? When you shlipped me my share of the shwag, I shaid to myself: 'Whash use tryin' to shave money? I better have one grand shweet day of it; and shpend it before shome other shief shwipes it off me.' So I buysh me a complete outfit from my shkin out. Whatta you shink of my shilk hat—and my shwaller tail coat—and my yellow shoes? Look at my shocks!" He put out a foot like a Gladstone bag. "I alwaysh wanted a pair of green shocks—never had a pair till to-day. Oh, I'm one hot dressher, all right, all right.

"And not only zhat, but"—he dropped his voice to an impressive whisper—"my underclozhe—you'd ought to see my underclozhe—shilk—honestogawd! If I



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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wazh to take off my outshide ragsh, I'd look like one of them handsome guysh in the advertishements—short sleeves, and the—the resht of 'em comes only to my kneesh.

“Hully zhee, I feel shwell! Thish Waldorf gang ain't got anyshing on me. Shay, whyn't you interdoosh me to our little friend here? He looksh like a A-1 confidensh operator. Whash his little game?”

If either Memling or Nellie could have moved just then, murder would have been the least of the things they would have done to their bibulous ex-confederate. But their condition was perfectly diagnosticated in Gold-tooth's next sally:

“Shay, what ailsh youse guysh? Are you osshified?”

Van Veen alone could speak. He said:

“Dear me, who is this person?”

Gold-tooth rounded on him angrily: “Pershon? Whozh a pershon? I'm no more of a pershon zan you are, old Mishter Greengoodsh.”

Van Veen ignored him. “Who is he, I say?” he stormed at Nellie.

Nellie managed to stammer: “Don't mind him, he's not responsible; he's been drinking.”

“Can't I see that?” Van Veen shrieked. “But who is he? Get him out, or I shall have to leave.”

Gold-tooth tried to speak, but Nellie rose with tardy resolution, and elbowed him into a chair, while she tried to explain:

“He's a distant relatuff of my poor husband's. He's never been quite right.”

Gold-tooth essayed to rise and protest, but she held him fast in his chair, and silenced him by the simple method of pressing her fist against his mouth.



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## *The Bomb Explodes*

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"You can tell by the look of him that he's not all there. He's not quite bad enough to keep in an asylum, but he's a terrible coise—curse to his family."

Van Veen was not appeased; he kept brushing his shoulder, as if the man's imbecility might be contagious. Memling made a pitiful effort to support Nellie in her distress.

"You can see by the conformation of that skull that the poor fellow is congenitally—congenitally——" the big words stuck in Memling's throat, but Gold-tooth almost swallowed Nellie's hand as his mouth opened to its full capacity in a bellow of indignant protest.

"You let my shkull alone! My shkull's all right." He rose from the chair, shoved Nellie aside, and turned to Van Veen to defend his impugned honor: "Don't you lisshen at 'em. They're zhealous of me—thash what! My shkull wash good enough for 'em to lean on when they wanted to pull off that shinemashograph shtunt, up in Ucayga. I told Memling myshelf about how I knowed all about moving pickshers, and when he wanted to clean out old Van Veensh eshtate, up in Ucayga, didn't he ashk me to go along and help him? Didn't he? And zhen didn't he try to hold out on me? He did."

"Don't you believe what he tellsh you about my shkull; itsh a mighty good shkull, and many a cop has broke his locusht on it, and not made a dent. If you got any zhob you want to pull off, you call on me—zash all. My name's Leshner. Gold-toosh, the boys call me. I don't know your name, bo, but lemme warn you to be careful wish them two guysh. They'll uzhe you, and then they'll abuzhe you. They're a gang of sheap shkatesh, and I don't care who knowsh it."

He clapped his "shilk" hat on his angry "shkull,"



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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gave the crown a dilapidating slap, and wavered from the room. Nobody tried to stop him.

### CHAPTER XXXIII

#### THROUGH THE VACUUM CLEANER

WHEN the door had ceased to quiver from the vicious slam that Gold-tooth gave it, as a sort of farewell damn, the room was possessed by utter silence.

Memling was too deeply nauseated with life in general, and his own shame in particular, to care what happened. Nellie's soul was in a typhoon of dismay. Van Veen alone was unmoved. He sat there, a calm little giant, as he had sat through many a panic, when bulls and bears were stampeding and running amuck through fortunes.

Just a moment Van Veen sat motionless, then he reached out for the telephone that stood on a table, brought it close, and said, in a perfectly quiet, almost mincing tone:

"This is Mr. Roger Van Veen. Understand? A man is coming down in the elevator. You will know him by his silk hat and yellow shoes. Ask the house detective to meet him and detain him. Make haste, and let me know. Understand? Good!" Then he turned his little bottle-gray eyes on Memling and Nellie, and simply murmured:

"Now."

They could have killed him at once, but the telephone was at his elbow—and they were not of that sort, or that mood. Memling sat in haughty disdain, too proudly meek to say a word. Nellie thought first of trying deception. A glance at the millionaire's keenly intelligent



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## *Through the Vacuum Cleaner*

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face banished all hope of outtricking this old trickster. She thought she would brazen it out. Then she glanced at Memling, white as one of his own statues, and her love for him, her terror of the disaster that would engulf his genius, overwhelmed every other emotion. She said:

“Mr. Van Veen, it looks like you had us where the hair is short. Our jig’s up. I don’t care what happens to me; it don’t matter. I was born a crook, and I grew up crooked; but Mr. Memling, here—you mustn’t do anything to hoit him. He’s had more’n his share. What I told you about the pediment group was all on the level. The grafters did him doit. They broke his heart on him. When he come back to America he hadn’t a cent. He’d gave all he had to the Dagos that woiked for him. He fell under the infloence of a pickpocket who saved him from starving. And that’s on the level, too. He was going abroad to begin all over. Him and I was just saying how grand it would be to be honest. I’d ’a’ liked it, too, but it don’t matter about me. If you got any heart in you, don’t send Mr. Memling up the river. Leave him go, and put it all on me. I’ll soive his time and my own, too, and glad of the chance. Oh, you can’t, you can’t, before Gawd, you can’t make a convict out of a genius like him. Say you won’t.”

She leaned forward, her hands outstretched appealingly. Van Veen only smiled. She went to her knees, and hunched toward him for a last appeal.

“You asked me to love you once, and I wouldn’t. You asked me to be your wife, and I wouldn’t. I will now. If you’ll let him off, you can have me, Mr. Van Veen, you can have me, and welcome——”

“Stop!” Memling had leaped to his feet.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Then the telephone bell rang. Van Veen put the receiver to his ear.

"Hello. Yes, this is Mr. Van Veen. Oh, it's Mr. O'Brien? Yes. That's good. Just detain him there. Don't let him talk. I may want you up here—but not just now. Thanks, that's good." He hung up the receiver, and turned back quietly.

"You were saying, Mr. Memling?"

In the interval, Memling had found a moment for clear thought. He saw that Nellie's whole future was as deeply involved as his own, as important as his own. For a rare interval of self-forgetfulness, her welfare became more important than his own.

He gathered the terrified girl in his arms, lifted her to a chair, and advanced on Van Veen. Van Veen reached for the telephone. Memling paused, and smiled.

"Don't worry. I'll not hurt you. You are a very clever man, Mr. Van Veen—too clever for me—but you lack imagination. That is my profession—or it used to be. I won't stoop to apologize, or to beg for mercy. I won't appeal to what you haven't got. I wonder if you have a sense of humor? I suppose not, or you'd never have succeeded as a financier."

"I don't quite follow you," said Van Veen, a trifle puzzled.

"I don't think you do. I was just following out the consequences of your line of action. You have us entirely in your power. If I am arrested, I shall plead guilty. But where will that leave you?"

"Just where I was, Mr. Memling."

"Oh, no; not at all. It will make you immortal."

"Immortal, Mr. Memling?"

"Immortal, Mr. Van Veen. You will become the clas-



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## *Through the Vacuum Cleaner*

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sic example of the rich art collector. You will become a proverb, a common noun, a verb. In the future, when anyone wishes to refer to a millionaire who buys canvases by the yard, and statuary by the ton, and who hasn't the faintest idea of what he has, people will call him a 'van-veen,' with two very small v's. When a millionaire picks up alleged old masters, whose names he can't pronounce, taking the mere word of a critic, or a collector, people will say, 'Aha, he has been rogervanveening again.'

"The newspapers will not find poor Nellie and me worth much space. I'll be only a poor devil of a sculptor who failed to climb out of obscurity, and fell into Sing Sing with a thousand other unimportant fools.

"But when Mr. Van Veen has a stomach ache, Wall Street takes pills. When Mr. Van Veen says that the country ought to be prosperous, even though it isn't, and he is, it's worth a column in every paper in the country. What won't they say if it comes out in court that when a gang of thieves looted Mr. Van Veen's estate, in Ucayga, two of the thieves, unable to get rid of the art works otherwise, sold them back to Mr. Van Veen himself, and he didn't know the difference?

"It will turn the front pages into a comic supplement, Mr. Van Veen. You will be the national joke. You will be classic at once. The newspapers never willingly let such a joke die. When you die, they'll put it on your tombstone: 'Here lies Roger Van Veen, the innocent art collector, who couldn't recollect his own collection.' I wish I were as sure of undying fame as you are, Mr. Van Veen. Why, you'll be embalmed in the vocabulary."

Roger Van Veen could see through a millstone when a hole was punched through it for him. He did not fancy putting this millstone about his neck. He was giving mil-



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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lions away to charities and universities to insure his immortality. He would have forfeited a million dollars rather than fasten such immortality on his name as Memling pictured for him. He felt very sick of the whole transaction. But he would not show the white feather; he temporized, and asked, with a sneer that masked his confusion:

“Do you calmly propose to me that I should let you walk out of here, and go scot-free, with all the money I paid you?”

If Memling had been built of millionaire stuff, he would have answered “Yes,” but he had no financial genius. He grasped at the hope implied in Van Veen’s words, and seized the shadow rather than the substance. He thought he would bribe the old skinflint.

“Oh, as for the money, we’ll pay that back. All we ask is our liberty. Then we’ll swear to keep silent about selling you your own property.”

The financier saw his power. He clutched it, and saved his own self-respect.

“Very well. Give me back everything I paid you, and all you took from me, and I’ll call it square.”

Memling answered: “We can only give you back our letters of credit and all the cash we have left. The rest is beyond recall.”

An hour later, as Memling and Nellie were seated on a bench in Central Park, Mr. Van Veen’s automobile passed them. He did not bow. But the odor and the dust of his motor car enveloped them where they sat, paupers, with night coming on, and hunger beginning to emphasize their general emptiness.

This was Nellie’s thought, too; for she sighed:



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## *Hungry*

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"I feel as if somebody had went through us with a vacuum cleaner."

### CHAPTER XXXIV

#### HUNGRY

THAT gone feeling was doubly present at Dirk Memling's equator, for his money belt was as empty as his stomach.

A few hours before he had been lunching a millionaire luxuriously at the Claremont. At that time his girdle had been so crowded as to hamper his appetite. And now both guest and wealth had taken wings, and his appetite raged unhampered. Now he sat doleful and forlorn on a park bench. Alongside moped Nellie Gaskell, his sometime model, and his companion in many a prosperous, many a preposterous time. This one afternoon had seen them at both extremes of affluence and poverty.

"We got what we desoive," Nellie brooded. "We otta known better than traipse around with a plutocrat. Those millionaires can sweat pennies out of a baby's bank without opening it. A man like old Van Veen senses money through a stone wall. And money knows its master just like a dog does. When Van Veen sniffs a dollar, he just gives it the high sign and moimurs: 'Get to me'—and it gets."

The exquisite Memling was too profoundly depressed to wince at Nellie's inelegancies of diction.

"If anybody but Van Veen had taken it away from us," he sighed, "it wouldn't be so disgusting. But we were so proud of stealing his pictures. And when we sold



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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them back to him for big money, we thought we were the greatest geniuses that ever lived. And now to have him take everything away from us!—why, it makes me feel like a mere amateur.”

“You’re dead right,” moaned Nellie. “To be run over by our own come-on—it’s awful, abs’lutely awful. There’s sumpum inspiring about risking a sentence to the penitentiary; but to feel that we’ve oined a place in the Home for the Feeble-minded—it was coarse woik.”

“And all our dreams of living honestly in the future, where are they?”

“On board the steamer we missed,” said Nellie.

“Our dreams of honesty!” sighed Memling. “In the words of Villon, ‘Where are the snows of yesteryear?’”

“Vee-yon?” said Nellie. “Is he the lad that wrote ‘The Beautiful Snow’?”

“Not the same—he was a poet,” said Memling. “He was a thief, too, a worse thief than I’ve ever been, but a great artist. They had him in jail, and he came near swinging for a job that ended in a killing. But people forgive him all that now. They love him for it. Posterity forgives anybody anything, if he will only create some beautiful work of art before he dies. I could have done something big in sculpture if I hadn’t been prevented. I’ll do it yet. I’ve got to, Nellie. If I can only finish one statue before I get locked up for life, they can say what they want to about the rest of my record. But I’ve got to finish a statue, Nellie.”

“Oh, you’ll win out, never fear. Nothing can stop a foist-class genius like you are. The Old Nick himself couldn’t poivoit a talent like yours.”

If she had opposed him or ridiculed him she might have braced him; but the soft word of agreement with



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## *Hungry*

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self-praise undermines it. So Memling, under the influence of Nellie's idolatry, collapsed:

"Here I sit, talking big and doing nothing. Carving statues takes time, and money, and leisure. And the one great ambition that is gnawing me now is an ambition to carve a thick steak, classically draped with onions. That's how much of a poet I am. I'm hungry."

"Me, too," said Nellie. "My Little Mary thinks I've had all my teeth pulled. 'A steak, a steak, my kingdom for a steak,' as George Broadhoist says. But I can't see how we're going to get a red cent without nipping it."

"Don't! don't!" groaned Memling, all the gentleman in him protesting. "I can't endure the thought of any more thievery."

"And I can't endure much more of this foodless frolic, either," said Nellie. "You sit still here and I'll rustle round and see if I can't swipe a pocketbook or a watch off somebody. The park is full of people saving car fare and calling it exercise."

"Don't you dare!" growled Memling. "Do you think I'd permit you to soil your beautiful fingers with pocket picking?"

"It's awful nice of you, Doik, but if I don't, I won't soil my fingers with food, either. They're kind of out of practice, and I run a swell chance of getting nabbed in the act, but I've gotta do it."

"No, no—anything but that."

She fixed on him a gaze of devotion. A mother could not have regarded a hungry child with more desperate compassion. A mother could not have longed more holily in any extreme endeavor.

"It's gotta be done, Doik. I can't just sit here and listen to my appetite yell. And you—you'll faint and



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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roll off this bench if you don't stow sumpum solid. You wait here—or meet me somewheres—and I'll make a raise somehow. It's getting so dark, it will be easy."

"I'd rather die," he said. "I've drifted pretty low, but not that low. I'll not send the woman I love——"

"Doik!" she groaned, with a stab of rapture at the word. She was more anhungered for a little love talk than for any other food. Her hand found his, and the policeman strolling by noted it. But he was a park policeman, and spooning was no luxury to him. He sauntered past, never dreaming what a pair of conspirators he overlooked.

As Memling grew hungrier, his principles grew fainter:

"It's bad enough to have to postpone honesty again indefinitely; but if we must steal—and I suppose we must—in Heaven's name let us steal like artists. I can't bear the thought of a cheap Philistine crime—a platitudinous theft."

Nellie saw that he was weakening; she said: "What would you consider a crime that wasn't a—a—one of those things you said?"

"Well, if we could lift Cleopatra's Needle and hold it for ransom till the city paid up and no questions asked, I wouldn't mind that. Or if we could carry off the reservoir and sell it to Chicago. Or if we could steal a platoon of policemen without using political pull—those things would be interesting. Their picturesqueness would atone for any slight immorality."

His eyes brightened at the throngs of motor cars bustling past like driftwood on the upper Niagara. "Or," he said, "if we could steal a flock of taxicabs; that would be worth while. By Jove, I wonder if we couldn't."



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## *Hungry*

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Nellie rebuked him coldly: "I've hoid of taxicabs robbing people, but I never hoid of anybody robbing a taxicab. I don't believe it could be done."

"All the more reason for trying. The older I grow, Nellie, the more I am convinced that the only thing worth attempting is the impossible. Now, if we could——"

But Nellie's mind was obsessed with a more immediate "if."

"I wonder if we eat. Haven't you got even the price of a plate of soup on you? I'm so hungry I believe I could empty a dish of oatmeal."

"If I saw a dish of tripe I'd lift my hat and tell it how well it was looking. But old Van Veen took even the pocket dust."

"Couldn't we get something charged somewheres? Pierre Bonpland would stake us to a meal, I'm sure."

"Yes, but we told him good-by, and—even if he trusted us, how could we get out alive? We haven't even a coin to tip the waiter with. I'd rather go hungry than face an untipped waiter. Besides, Nellie, food is only part of our problem. Where is a roof to shelter us? The thought of a park bench all night is appalling, especially as the city, with true American hospitality, has put iron arms at just such intervals that one can neither lie under them nor over them."

"We're soitainly up against it, Doik," said Nellie. "Up against it? Why, we're 'way into it!"



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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### CHAPTER XXXV

#### THE ONE SURE TALISMAN

SO they sat, while a dejected twilight went about the sky, pulling down the curtains and setting out a few stingy candles to emphasize the dark. Nellie shivered and coughed. She put her hand to her throat to rub it warm. She gave a start and a gasp. Memling jumped.

"Nellie! Nellie! What's the matter? Did a spider bite you?"

"Spider nothing. I just struck a gold mine. Say! Doik, I'm a millionairess."

"Great heavens, the poor girl has gone mad!"

"Mad nothing! Do you remember once we were talking about superstitions and lucky pieces and charms, and you said you didn't believe in such things?"

"I remember we had many disputes of that sort, yes. Why?"

"And you made me throw away that rabbit's foot?"

"I probably did."

"And you said you only knew one kind of charm that would really ward off bad luck?"

"I don't quite recall that."

"Well, you was feeling flush at the time, and you gave me one."

"Did I? What was it?"

"You said it was an armlet or something against evil. And you says to me, 'Nellie, there's only one sure preventive of the evil eye, only one charm that will ward off the woist danger in the woild.' And you gave me one."



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## *The One Sure Talisman*

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"Did I? Tell me! What was it?"

"A hundred-dollar gold piece. You had a little chain made for it, and a locket with a piece of Uncle Sam's best in it. I've worn it so long I forgot I had it. I wonder how Van Veen missed it. But here it is."

She unfastened the infallible phylactery and put it in his hand. He welcomed it with a cry of joy: "'Saved!' cried Clifford de Montmorency, as he swooned at the feet of Lady Vere de Vere."

Memling felt like a child when a light is brought into a bogey-infested nursery. "A hundred dollars!" he gasped. "I didn't know there was so much gold in this country. Some people say that the United States coinages are not beautiful. But this is the most perfect example of the numismatic art."

"Numis—nothing," said Nellie. "I wonder how much we could get on it at a pawnshop."

"About two dollars," said Memling, from the fund of experience. "But why pawn it, when we can get full value for it by just having it changed?"

"I hate to give it up; it's a keepsake."

"Then let it keep us from starving. And I'll get you another when I'm flush again. Of course, it would be more thrilling to pass this if it were counterfeit, but we mustn't ask too much. And to think that I once had a hundred dollars to give away!" Then he remembered that he was gloating over something that did not belong to him. He pressed it back in Nellie's hand and said, "Thank Heaven, you're provided for, Nellie. I can shift for myself."

She stared at him, aghast. "Do you think I'd desoit you now?"

"Well, I could hardly allow you to support me."



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"You couldn't, eh? Well, either you come along quiet and behave or I'll scream, and accuse you of being a big-amist who left me to starve with my eight kids."

Memling knew that she was capable of anything in his behalf, and he was very, very hungry, so he said: "All right, anything for a quiet life."

"Where shall we eat—the Waldorf?"

"Well, hardly—not after what happened there this afternoon."

"That's so. Where else is there? The Plaza?"

"Let's try the Knickerbocker."

"Fine!"

With only a hundred dollars between them and destitution, of course they had to spend it as quickly as possible. So they resolved to do the thing in style.

They waited till they saw a passing taxicab with the red flag of vacancy flying. Memling hailed it as if he owned Golconda, and helped Nellie in as if she were the Czarina of every one of the Russias.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### THE TAXI-PIRATE

OF all the indignations human beings can feel, the most indignant is that of the thief against the parasitic thief who would rob him of his stolen goods. In spite of her air of grandeur, Nellie kept her eye on the taximeter. Before the car had gone the quarter of a mile, the little register dropped from fifty cents to sixty. Once out of the park, she could tell the distance by the



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## *The Taxi-Pirate*

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number of blocks. When the taxicab had gone three blocks the recorder dropped again to the higher level of seventy cents.

Nellie nudged Memling.

"Look, Doik, they got a phony clock on this taxi-cheater."

"What do you expect?"

"But at this rate, by the time we get to the Knickerbocker, we'll owe this lad our hundred dollars and something over. I'm going to stop him."

"Don't make a scene."

"Make a scene? I'll have his life, that's all. I can't abide the thought of being robbed."

She reached forward, lowered the front glass, and dug her nails into the chauffeur's shoulder. He whirled round so quickly that the car ran up on the curb.

"What's the matter wit' youse?" he growled, as he backed off.

"Nothing's the matter with us. But that meter of yours has got a hemorrhage."

"Ah, go wan! It's inspected regular."

"Yes, but who inspects it? You do, I suppose. And I suppose you take us for a bridal couple from Osawatomie?"

The taxi driver whirled round and leaned in truculently.

"If youse doubt my word, youse know what youse can do."

"Yes, wese can drive to the police station."

It was a magnificent bluff, for the very word "police" sent a shiver through Memling and Nellie. But it had a cooling effect also on the taxi driver. He attempted pathos:



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"Ah, youse ain't gonna git me in trouble, are youse? I can't leave me wife and kids to starve."

"If you got kids," said Nellie, with all the vigor of the repartee she had learned in her earlier environment, "it would be doin' 'em a favor to leave 'em starve. You set your clock back and we'll drop the subject."

"Ah, how can I set it back? It's locked."

"Well, do you think we're going to sit here and watch the dimes drop off that clock like leaves off a tree?"

He pondered a minute, then he brightened.

"Well, I'll tell you what."

"What?"

"I'll throw the flag up to 'Vacant' and take you the rest of the way for nothin'."

"We're rung up as far as Williamsboig now," said Nellie. "And we'd look nice—wouldn't we—riding in a wagon marked 'Vacant'?"

There was a moment's silence, and the driver took off his cap for the homely purpose of scratching his thick head. Nellie glared, and murmured:

"For gracious sake, look who's here! If it isn't me old friend, Willie with the Wen!"

The driver drew his cap on again with violence.

"Nix on that," he growled, looking anxiously at the staring passers-by. "I've reformed."

"Reformed! You used to be a second-story man, and now you run a taxi. You ain't reformed; you've gone from bad to worse."

"And who are you, that you know so much?"

"Who am I? Why, I'm the duchess of Boikley Square, and this is the dook."

The best that Wensome Willie could scare up in answer to this was:



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## *The Taxi-Pirate*

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"Ah, go wan!"

He leaned farther in to stare through the dusk light. Nellie pushed him back with a curt:

"Where you think you are? On somebody's porch?"

The motion brought her forward into the glow from a street lamp, and Willie grinned.

"Well, I'll be—— Hello, Nellie! Who'd 'a' thought of—— Say! you're all right. You had me goin', though. I t'ought you was a lady detectuff. Well, well; welcome to our city. Who's the guy you got in tow?"

"Me husband," said Nellie, using the most economical term.

"Ah, go wan!" was Willie's refrain.

Memling was not enjoying the encounter of the two ancient friends.

"If you don't mind, I'll get out and walk," he said sternly.

"Gimme me fare first," said Willie, "and you can run."

Memling sank back. His entire available capital was Nellie's gold piece. Willie felt that he commanded the situation:

"Are youse bound for the Knickerbocker, on the level? Or are you goin' to go in on the level and go out by the subway?"

"We was intending to stop to dinner," said Nellie, with majesty.

"Where do youse go from there?" said Willie. "I'm turning this freight car in after this trip, and I'd like to have a good talk over old times. Where do youse hang out now?"

This was a poser. Memling wanted to send the man about his business, but it occurred to Nellie that he might



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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be of some vague use in their present situation. The gold piece would not last forever.

"We've just struck town," she said. "We're not settled yet. Where would you advise?"

"I know a swell boarding house," he said. "I garage there myself. You can get a whole floor there for the price of a hat check at the Knicker—and a good meal for what you'd tip the tray chauffeur. Come on over."

After some hesitation they agreed to this.

"All right," said Nellie. "After all, the Knicker is lighted up something fierce."

Willie spun his wheel and, turning round, tooled them northward, then down a side street, where he introduced them to a landlady who regarded them as suspiciously as they her. But she took them in. She even consented to serve dinner for three in Memling's room.

It was a poor dinner, but by the time it was spread Willie was ready to join them.

Memling had warned Nellie to avoid gossip of her own past, but the warning was unnecessary. Willie was zealous for talk. He led so silent a life on his pulpit that he was overjoyed to find an audience, and he was so garrulous of his evil deeds that Nellie finally commented:

"It's a good thing you don't carry a meter on your jaw, Willie. You'd soon owe yourself more'n you're worth."

Willie's reminiscences led him finally into a discourse on the joys of the taxicab career. He had a sense of humor that made a crooked life one long, sweet comedy. He gave a revelation of the inner workings of a dishonest garage that astonished even Nellie.

"I used to envy the owners of automobiles, but I don't



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## *The Taxi-Pirate*

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now. Seems as if you cheffures committed every crime on oith inside those garadges, except moider."

"They save that for outside," said Memling. "It doesn't mess up the garage so much."

Nellie was reminded of the park: "Mr. Mem—Doctor Boikley here was saying a while ago that he'd like to steal a flock of autos; but I guess he'd lose money at that."

"That depends on how you work it," said Willie.

Memling, who had sat rather contemptuously glum, put in another cynical remark:

"I always say that anybody can steal anything; the trouble is to dispose of it. Any fairly clever mind could devise some scheme for capturing a drove of cars, but what could he do with them if he had them? I imagine it would be very hard to get them out of the State and sell them."

"Why take 'em out of the State?" said Willie.

"You couldn't keep them here," said Memling. "Any fool knows that the numbers are registered, and there must be secret factory numbers on the engines in various places."

"Yes, but——"

"Besides, I have noticed that people who are addicted to motors can tell their make as far as they can smell them."

"Yes, but——"

"And I fancy that the kidnapped motor would not run far before it would be recognized and—arrested."

Willie, finding a chance now to speak, summed up his comment in a shrug he had learned from a French chauffeur:

"You steal me the cars, and I'll dispose of 'em, all right."



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"Do you mean it?"

"Sure I mean it."

Then ensued a collaboration between a poetic mind and a practical mind full of technical lore. What Memling did not know about garagery, Willie did. What Willie could not imagine, Memling could.

And so before midnight a scenario was mapped out. But it involved so much greater outlay of time than Nellie's lucky gold piece could span, that Willie was compelled to take into the plot the manager of the garage from which he rented his car.

The man, a Mr. Kirk, was induced to attend a conference at the boarding house. He came to scoff, but remained to pay. Memling, indeed, had worked up so plausible a campaign that Mr. Kirk consented to fund the enterprise.

"We haven't got a chance," he said, "but it appeals to the sporting blood of an old racing chauffeur."

When it came to advancing his own cash, his sporting pulse suffered a distinct retardation; for, after all, since Memling's whole plan was to steal somebody's else money, what was to prevent him from beginning at home, and robbing his backer?

Memling wanted to be very indignant at this aspersion on his honor, but he was gagged by the realization that his honor was already pretty well immersed in aspersion. So he swallowed the insult as one gulps a fishbone.

Mr. Kirk called Memling "Doctor Berkley"—since that was the name Nellie had improvised for him. And he finally said:

"Well, doc, I'll stake you, but only on the installment plan. You've got to go to a good hotel, and I'll slip you a little money every day, as you have to have it.



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## *The Taxi-Pirate*

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But where do you hail from, and what's your business?"

"I own a marble quarry in Palatka, Tennessee, and I'm in New York to buy a good touring car and a strong truck."

"Oh, you are, are you? Well, do you know what's the first thing the sales managers will do when you hand them that?"

Nellie spoke up: "Why, Mr. Koik, the moment they lay eyes on Doctor Boikley they'll believe anything he says."

"Oh, they will, will they? Excuse me while I laugh. Ha-ha! The first thing they'll do will be to say: 'Excuse me. I'm wanted on the telephone!' Then they'll go into a private office and look up their little Business Man's Bible."

"Their what?"

"Their Dun or Bradstreet. There they'll find that there's nobody of your name in Palatka, and they'll ask you for cash in advance, before they send the order to the factory."

This was a poser. Memling's elaborate scheme began to totter. He rescued it with an inspiration:

"What if I should take the actual name of some actual quarrier in Palatka?"

"That's not so worse. I'll look up Palatka and find if there's a quarry there."

"I know there's a quarry there," said Memling. "I've used Palatka marble myself."

"You have?" exclaimed Kirk. "I thought you were a doctor?"

Memling's sculptorship was a secret. It was about to escape. He recaptured it by a careless cynicism.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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“Who has more use for marble than a doctor?”

“Oh, I see,” said Kirk. “I suppose the undertaker gives you a rake-off. Well, I’ll go consult my little commercial concordance, and get you a good name in good standing in Palatka. While I’m gone little Willie-off-the-car, here, can pump you full of technical language.”

### CHAPTER XXXVII

#### THE MARBLE-MAN FROM PALATKA

THE grass had been flourishing in Wall Street all summer, and the only interest in the market was to see what new low records could be achieved. With the volume of sales growing regularly “smaller by degrees and beautifully less,” the automobile manufacturers were in a chastened mood. The best of them did not sneer or snicker even when he heard that Major Beauregard Kershaw, of Palatka, was in town just looking around.

Memling had known many Southerners, and he could mimic the dialect well enough to satisfy a Northern ear. He trained his mustache and bleached it gray—and bleached his hair at the temples; wore a flat-brimmed black hat, carried himself like an old rebel, and tried to remember to punctuate his sentences freely with “suh.”

He had planned to call himself “Kunnel,” but Memling always liked a touch of the unusual, so he reduced himself to a bare majority. But he learned to say “Majjah” with a fine sonority. The impersonation might never have satisfied Palatka, but it captured New York at sight.

The first wareroom to be honored with his visit was



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## *The Marble-man from Palatka*

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the palatial garage of the Telemotor Company. Here, on a lake of hard wood, islanded with rugs of royal price, a few cars were distributed like anchored gondolas. Venetian law, however, compels gondolas to be of black, while these wheeled boudoirs were of every rainbow hue, enameled, bright-brassed, nickel-finished, patent-leathered. Beneath them mirrors threw an upward light into their inner workings.

On balconies or under them sat the gleaming desks of the salesmen, each of them surely a baron.

The manager of the Telemotor Company was a Mr. Galkin. He received the distinguished elderly person with condescending grace.

"Ah haven't a kyard with me," said Memling, "but Ah am Majah Beauregard Kershaw, of Palatka, suh."

"Ah, of Palatka!" said Mr. Galkin, beaming with satisfaction, as if all his life he had longed to meet somebody from Palatka, and here he was at last. "Sit down, major, won't you?"

"Ah thank you, suh. Ah'll be as brief as possible, and not take mo' of you' time than Ah can he'p. It's right valuable, Ah reckon."

"Well, we are rather busy, but my time is yours, major. Have a cigar."

"Ah thank you, suh. We old waw hosses do feel a little mo' comfortable with ouah teeth on a cheroot. Now, the puppose of mah visit is this: Daown thah in Palatka Ah own a mobble quarry, and Ah need an automobile or tew."

"Ah, yes, of course. Excuse me, I'm wanted on the telephone."

Mr. Galkin vanished. Through a crack in the door Memling could see him consulting a huge flat volume—



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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doubtless the Business Man's Bible. Mr. Galkin returned with even greater deference, having evidently found that B. Kershaw, of Palatka, rated high.

"You were saying, major, that you want an automobile or two. What style do you prefer—touring car, limousine, roadster, runabout? We have them in all styles, and guarantee everything except the tires."

"Yes, suh, the style of kyar doesn't matta so much as its ability to climb hills."

"Our cars could climb the Singer Building. We won the first prize at the Gladen contest, a silver cup at the Beymer contest, and—well, you can see our trophies in the case over there."

"Well, that's good, for the grades in mah quarries are right smaht. The roads are rough, and—well, you know our Southe'n roads."

"They will be easy enough for the Telemotor."

"No doubt, suh. But would you submit to a test?"

"Certainly, certainly. We welcome any test. We'll give you a demonstration on the Fort George hill—or anywhere."

"That's right nice of you. Now, Ah've noticed that in Westchester County thah's a limestone quarry that looks something like mine. Ah was wonderin' if you would give one of yo' kyars a little whack at that for a test?"

"Nothing would please us more, major."

"That's ve'y handsome of you, suh. And if thah should be two or three kyars of otha makes thah at the same time, would you object?"

"Not at all, major; not at all. We ask nothing better than to meet any or all of our competitors."

"I admiah to heah you say it, suh. As mah time up



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## *The Marble-man from Palatka*

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Nawth is ratha limited, I may ask you to send a kyar thah next Sunday. It will be mo' quiet then."

"Delighted, major. And just to show you how fearless we are of competition, we'll have some reporters there; it will make a good news item."

The major flushed a trifle at this, and coughed once or twice into his handkerchief. Then he explained:

"Ah don't wish to dictate tums, suh. But we gentlemen from the South don't fancy newspaper notoriety. Besides"—he leaned forward and spoke confidentially, though nobody was within earshot—"besides, Ah don't want mah rivals in Palatka to know that I'm going in for mota kyars till after I've gone and got them right thah on the spot. You understand?"

"Perfectly. I shall see that not a soul knows of this, and I'll instruct our chauffeurs to say nothing.

"That's right obliging of you. I'll telephone you pahiculahs latah."

"Thanks, major. And where are you stopping?"

"At the Hotel Knickabockah, suh."

"Ah, of course. And how many cars shall I send you?"

"You might send a roadstah, a limousine, and one large truck. If the truck turns out well I might ordah a numbah of them."

"Excellent. Very good. Certainly. Have a fresh cigar, major."

"Thanks, Ah'll finish this fust. Good mawning, suh."

"Good morning, major."

If this chapter were duplicated in a dozen carbon copies it would serve, with very slight amendments, for the major's experience in each of the other warerooms he visited.



## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### THE GREAT HILL-CLIMBING TEST

THE old quarry in the hills of upper Westchester was nearly abandoned. A few Italians were engaged in blasting out the remnants of the limestone mine. But their work was chiefly a *dolce far quasi niente*. They found an excuse for doing less than usual on the following Friday and Saturday. For on these days they were surprised to note a sudden congestion of automobiles about their deserted region.

Cars came buzzing and zooming like a swarm of Gargantuan mosquitoes. They assailed the rough and winding hill with fury. They were often stalled, and they often ran faster backward than upward. There was much spitting of sparks, trembling to the verge of explosion, much cranking up, backing, and starting forward.

Surreptitiously the chauffeurs improved the worst blotches of road, removed the heaviest boulders, and filled level the deepest holes. Then they sped away, and the Italians returned to their pretense of labor.

Sunday the hill was absolutely deserted, without even a watchman. The nearest neighbors may have seen a few pedestrians go by; but they accepted them as evidently picnickers, for they carried lunch baskets with them.

In the afternoon there was another onset of automobiles, flocking to the foot of the hill like enormous microbes hurrying to a spot of infection. The congress of chauffeurs exchanged chauffeurish repartee, ridiculed



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## *The Great Hill-climbing Test*

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each other's machines, geyed each other's old ideas or new ideas. Several of them amiably endeavored to disable the engines of others, sprinkling glass under their tires, or loosening bolts unbeknownst. On this account there were numerous fights. These served to pass the time, but the chief problem, the incessant cry, was:

"Where is that major from Palatka?"

It was nearly dusk when the major arrived on foot, profuse with apologies and perspiration. He asked many questions, and before he was ready to give the word, it was so dark that a further delay was required to light up the searchlights and side lights.

There was as much chaos in arranging positions as in starting a yacht race, and there was infinite jockeying, colliding, sharp practice, and the usual sneakery of such a contest.

Finally the major put up his hand, and said:

"Gentlemen, Ah'm exceedingly sorry, but Ah'm afraid you-all will have to go up one at a time. We'll give every kyar a five minutes' start, and Ah'll recawd the exact moment each one leaves."

"Yes," said one chauffeur, "but who'll record the exact time each one gets there?"

"You'll find a friend of mine in a little shanty at the top of the hill. As each man arrives, please go in and repote. And you'll find a little something to eat—and perhaps a toothful of something to drink."

This last item was received with ovation.

"Oh, you major!"

A Telemotor limousine was the first to get away. The major held a stop watch in one hand and a notebook in the other. The Telemotor set out with a vim, and, flashing along the level, sped up the first acclivity with the in-



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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difference of a cockroach, and whirled round a curve out of sight.

Five minutes later the big International Fifty thundered away. And so, one by one, fifteen machines mounted and vanished.

The major seemed to be suffering with excitement, but who would not be? It was like a combat of dragons, each chauffeur a Siegfried to some conquered but protesting Fafner.

The last car to go was the pride of the Telemotor Company—a sort of flying hippopotamus of seventy horse power, with Mr. Galkin himself at the wheel. At his invitation the major swung aboard, and the car bucked the hill with a roar.

The Seventy soared the steep like an aëroplane breasting the ether; it rounded the first sharp curve with superb ease. Here a sharper grade filled with rolling rubble confronted it, and its glorious speed abated. Its wings seemed to fall off, and it settled down to the bitter grind of biting its way aloft.

The car trembled, and seemed to sweat blood. Smoke enveloped the charioteer, and every time Mr. Galkin set the clutch, the car emitted a snarl.

Mr. Galkin was sweating, too. He fought his engine as a jockey spurs and flogs a spent jade along a home stretch. He was about to despair, when he saw ahead of him a purple steamer, miserably stalled. Its chauffeur looked up with a grimy face, and glared murderously when Mr. Galkin sang out: "Hello, Matzen, shall I drop you a towline?"

Matzen howled back: "I bet I catch you before you get to the top and give you a bunt in the tail lights."

"Yes, you will!" Mr. Galkin laughed back, throwing



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## *The Great Hill-climbing Test*

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on a higher speed. The Telemotor seemed also to gain fresh strength from finding a hated rival in worse plight—or, perhaps, it was that the road was not so steep just there.

In any case, it took aboard impetus enough to hunch over a heartbreaking hummock. Then there was a short down grade. They swooped this, and throbbed up the opposite rise, and around another curve.

Here they almost cut off the feet of a mechanician supine under his car.

Three cars in all they passed thus, and then, just as everything pointed to a glorious climax, just as the Canaan of the peak was about to be achieved, something went wrong somewhere, and the car stopped short, with a sigh of despondency.

Mr. Galkin was overboard in a jiffy. He called out: "I'll have a new sparking plug in in a few minutes." But the major said: "Thanks, Mr. Galkin, for the lift. Ah reckon Ah'll walk the rest of the way."

As a matter of fact, he ran, fearing, wondering what he should find above. The height was deathly still. Not a car honked, snored, or missed fire.

Once he left the far-reaching glow of Mr. Galkin's searchlight, it was pitch dark, too. He made the last grade puffing like another overworked motor. He held his left hand over his breast, and wondered if his own carburetor would hold out till he reached the top. Major Memling would never have won a hill-climbing contest on his own feet.

But once at the height, he stumbled into a sort of constellation of parked automobiles, each with its searchlight like a comet sending a tail of dazzle into space.

A struggle of some sort was going on at the door of a



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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little sheet-iron shanty on which was dimly visible the legend

### “DYNAMITE!”

The major hurried to the scene of battle, and was suddenly set upon by masked men, gagged before he could speak, tripped, trussed, and flung to the ground.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### THE DYNAMITE SHED

HE fought hard, but fought with shadows—shadows that giggled, and overpowered, and paid no heed. He was smothered with inhaling his own profanity.

Then he was picked up like a meal sack and toted to the “Dynamite” shed.

Just as his captors were swinging him back and forth to give him a good heave into the interior dark, he heard a voice.

“Hully cheese, it’s the major! Well, of all the bone-heads, youse guys is the worst ossified! Talk about solid ivory! Leave him loose.”

It was the voice of Willie with the Wen, and it sounded like Wagner’s most luscious strain to Memling’s ear. He was set on his feet, his bonds whipped off, and the gag removed. He wavered and would have fallen, but Willie supported him, and explained in a husky whisper:

“Excuse these guys, old man. They ain’t seen you before. Everything’s went as smooth as silk up to now. We nabbed every one of them chaffies as he came up to report his time, and we’ve got ’em in there, stacked up as



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## *The Dynamite Shed*

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neat as cordwood. Go in and pipe 'em off. It will do your heart good."

The major stepped inside, and found an amazing array of well-bandaged chauffeurs of every make and lung-power, gagged, and bound, and spread out in wind-row. The sight was beautiful to him. A grinning individual stood over the array waving an electric flashlight here and there. Every pair of eyes glared like acetylene, but every gag imposed silence.

The major smiled, and said in his mellowest of tones:

"Gentlemen, Ah must apologize for this paht of the entertainment. It isn't mah idea of Southe'n hospitality at all, but Ah'm in the hands of mah Nawthe'n friends. Accommodations are so limited in this neck of woods that we had to stow you-all in this shanty. We have left an abundance of cold water in the bucket thah, as I understand no chauffuh evva drinks anything that might upset his eye. We are leaving also a basket of sandwiches alongside the bucket. Just he'p yo'selves as soon as you are free.

"We are regretfully compelled to lock the do', lest thieves should break in and steal you-all. But Ah have no doubt that some of you will manage to get yo' hands free befo' long. You can then release the othas. Then, if you-all will join in singing some familiar hymn such as 'We won't go home until mawning,' no doubt somebody will heah you and come up to ask you to stop.

"In the meanwhile Ah must beg you not to strike any matches or to pound too hahd on the walls, for the place has been used for storing dynamite. Any undue obstreperousness might result in getting you-all out of here in such small pieces that yo' families would find difficulty in collecting enough for the funeral. With these few wuds,



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Ah take mah leave of you, wishing you good night, and pleasant dreams."

Then the man with the flash stepped out, and the major withdrew. The sheet-iron door was closed gently, and the silent inmates heard the click of a padlock.

After that they heard a great racket, as of many machines being cranked up at once. Then they heard the diminishing tuff-tuff of one automobile after another.

Amazement was so overwhelming an emotion in that crowded shanty, that wrath had hardly room for berth. But it soon sprang full armed from many a forehead, and anyone with power to see in the dark would have seen such a writhing and twisting as could only be rivaled in a basket of eels.

## CHAPTER XL

### BEN HUR IN A MOTOR RACE

**I**N accordance with the best codes, the captain and the first mate of the enterprise saw all the rest of the life-boats safely away before they thought of making their escape.

Wensome Willie had reserved the best and fastest car for the homeward journey of Memling and himself, but they waited till each of the others was manned by one of Mr. Kirk's volunteers and sent humming down the back trail from the quarry, each under instructions as to just which of several roads he should take to New York and the garage.

Mr. Kirk himself usurped the next to the last car. When he had vanished into the gloom, Willie snickered:

"Hop aboard, doctor—er—major."



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## *Ben Hur in a Motor Race*

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The major stepped to his place, and Willie twirled the crank. Nothing happened. He twirled it again, cursing a little.

Suddenly he paused, listened, stared. The major leaned out to look to the rearward. Up the hill came a long beam of light and a throbbing sound. After it mounted a huge shadow, from which arrived the cheery voice of Mr. Galkin:

“Here I am, major. Take my time, will you?”

Willie bent to the crank once more. It responded, the engine began to chatter, the car to quiver. He bounded to the wheel, and the car slid down into the black dark, the searchlight boring a tunnel of radiance through gloom like a solid stone.

“Hully cheese, but we gotta beat it!” said Willie. “That old guy will hear those chaffies yelling, they’ll tell him what’s up, and he’ll hotfoot after us like a streak of lightning. He’s got twice my power, too.”

With the recklessness that would appall even a chauffeur, Willie plunged headlong into the uncertainties forward. Narrow escapes were commonplace. Yawning holes in the road, hairpin curves, breath-taking drops—he took them all as if they were the level sands of a Florida racing beach.

Memling kept sentry watch to the rear, glaring into the sea of ink that closed in on the car like swirling smoke. But he saw no pursuing eyes of light.

It was Willie that gave the first alarm. Their road curved so upon itself that, looking up, he descried something like a toy automobile cleaving the dark in the distance.

“Here he comes. See him scoot! We gotta douse them tail lamps of ours.”



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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He stopped short, with a spine-cracking abruptness, scuttled out, busied himself in the rear, and, returning, set the car off again with a sickening leap.

For miles they sped, breaking all speed laws, risking a thousand deaths. After a time Memling made out in the distance backward, a faint puncture of the black. It grew to two small eyes.

With dread fascination Memling watched them grow, till finally the pursuing beams overtook and passed them, and illuminated even their own path.

Willie's brain had been chugging as hard as his own engine. He said:

"He's coming alongside. Don't let him sneak a look at you. Oh, if he'd only get a blowout! And if we only wouldn't."

Now the noise of the pursuer overtook them. Soon they heard the voice of Mr. Galkin, no longer gentle and salesmanlike:

"Stop, you thieves! Stop, I say, you pirates! I've got you!"

Memling was in a cold sweat of terror. He saw himself already in a cell. But Willie was still murmuring counsel.

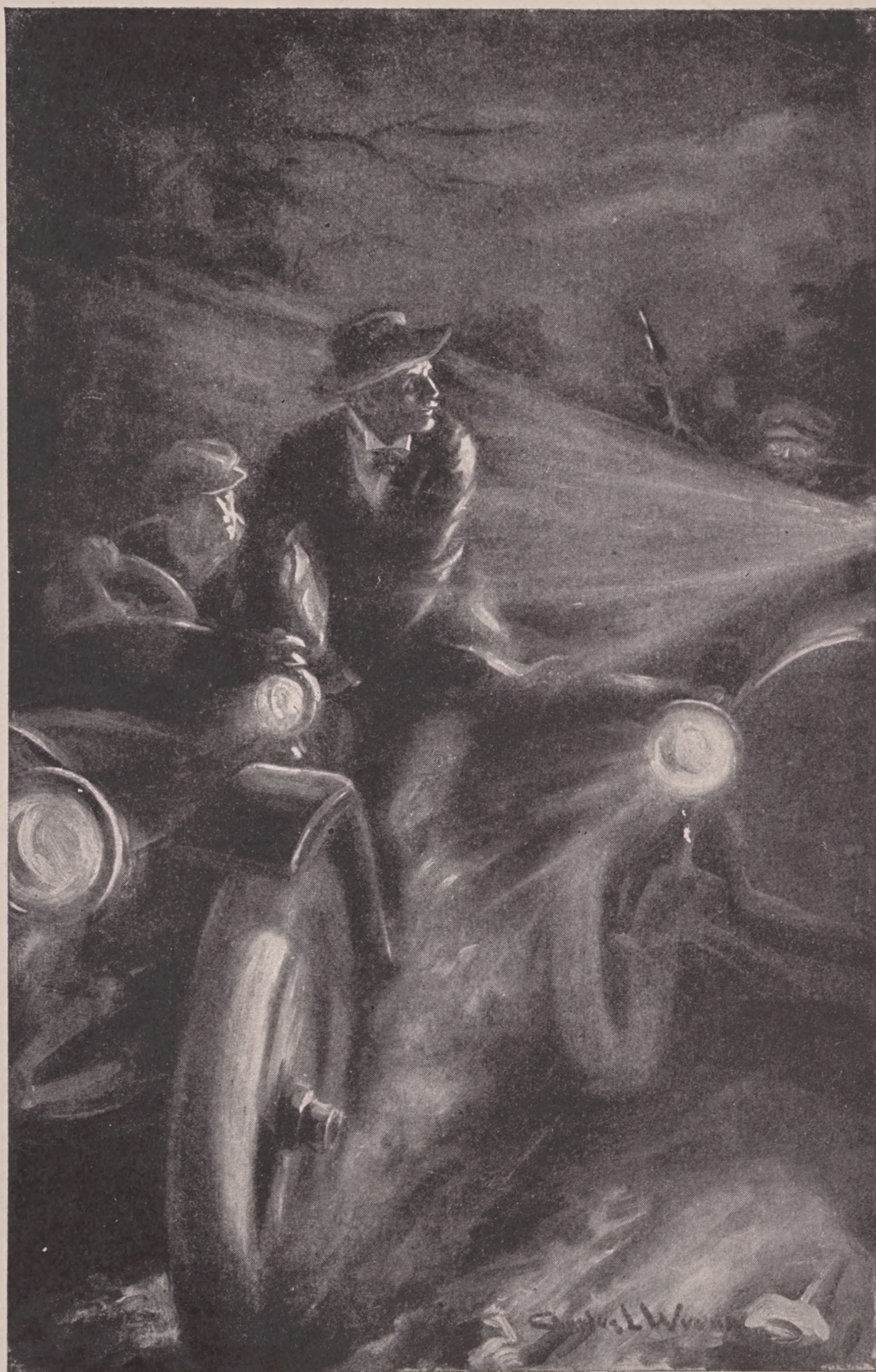
"Don't lose your nerve, doc," he said. "We got one last joker up our sleeve. Get ready to jump when I say the word. And pray hard."

The pursuer now rolled alongside, and, not daring to take his eyes off the reeling road, yelled threats and animadversions out of the side of his mouth:

"You come with me. I've got a gun here, and I'll shoot in a minute."

Willie answered never a word. He kept his gaze on what news the twin searchlight brought him of the imme-





“‘You come with me. I’ve got a gun here’”







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## *The Wholesale Automoburglary*

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diate path opening in front at cinematographic speed. But Galkin easily kept their pace. At last Willie muttered to Memling:

"Swing off on the footboard and give me a chance."

Memling groped out and clung to the hand grip. He stared ahead, imagining the worst. Suddenly a little plank bridge over a culvert leaped into view.

Willie rose at once, and sidled out of his seat, controlling the wheel with his right hand. As the two machines swept down upon the bridge, he gave the wheel a sharp tug. The car turned its nose into the flank of Mr. Galkin's car, and, locking wheels with it, rammed it aside and carried it crashing over the edge of the bridge.

Memling needed no word to jump. He tried to remember the best way to strike the ground. He struck it every which way.

He had a sense of hurtling through the solid earth along with some other catapulted missile. That was Willie.

## CHAPTER XLI

### THE WHOLESALE AUTOMOBURGLARY

BY some of those miracles which preserve the race of automobilists from wholesale extinction, neither of them was killed. And neither was Mr. Galkin, though he thought he was, when he first woke up in the mud to find two cars upside down on top of him and explosions of every sort taking place in all directions.

By the time he had crawled out of the wreckage, a ragbag for costume and a negro for color, Willie and Memling were limping down the road as fast as their



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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bruises permitted, and Willie was already cheerful enough to laugh:

"We look like two Grand Army vets runnin' a rheumatism race."

"But how do we ever get to New York?" Memling groaned.

"I don't know, but we've got to make it somehow."

They came to a short hill now, and it was like another Matterhorn to Memling, whose whole machinery was on strike. Willie paused at the top of the slope and pointed down the road.

Two cars were drawn up in the side grass. Men were tinkering with one of them.

"That's Kirk's car, and I guess it's Sweeny's that on the blitz. Hurry up and they'll give us a lift."

The two aching victims hobbled their best. As they approached, Willie's first guess was confirmed. Kirk and another man had been unable to resist the temptation to race. And the other car had skidded into a stone wall.

Mr. Kirk had stopped and backed up to offer his aid. When Willie explained his own pedestrian arrival, Kirk roared with anger:

"Do you mean to say that you dumped an International Fifty into a ditch and made junk out of it? Why, that car was worth five thousand dollars easy in my garage."

"In your garage, yes," Willie retorted, "but I wouldn't be worth five thousand cents in jail. I assassinated a Telemotor Seventy with that International Fifty. And, what's more, you'd better leave this busted Thirty here and get into town before somebody else catches us."

"And leave another four thousand dollars plastered along this wall!" growled Kirk. "Not on your life!"



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## *The Wholesale Automoburglary*

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"Oh, very well," said Willie. "Penny wise and pound foolish. First thing you know Galkin or somebody will come along and spot some of us guys and follow us right to your stable, or telephone the cops to meet us there. Then the whole jig is up."

But still Kirk tried to doctor the wounded car into activity. He might have been there yet if the infuriated Galkin had not crawled and stumbled to the top of the hill, glared down at the scene, and indiscreetly shouted one more bloodcurdling threat. He was only a battered wreck, but to the conspirators he was like Polyphemus howling from a cliff.

At the chilling sound of this cry out of the night, Kirk made no further delay. He darted to the wheel of the car he had stolen, and Memling, Willie, and the other chauffeur had hardly time to leap aboard before Kirk was off like the wind, leaving the four-thousand-dollar car to its fate.

A long, dark scutter through the everlasting country into the outskirts of the town, under the elevated railroad tracks, through the almost empty midnight streets brought them at last to Kirk's garage.

Fifteen cars had started to climb the hill. Three had failed to make the top. Their owners cursed their luck till the next day, when they blessed misfortune for its favor. Three cars had been disabled on the home run. The rest made the haven in safety, coming in one at a time along different paths.

The people of that street were too dismally accustomed to the clamor of automobiles turning into that garage after all manner of joy rides, to notice anything unusual in the arrival of nine cars, and their disappearance through the big door.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Once inside, they were run, one after another, aboard the huge elevator and hoisted in turn to the repair department on the third floor, where they were at once dismantled and dissected with furious enthusiasm by a crew of practical mechanics. Every identifying number was destroyed, every trace disguised.

In a few hours the nine disconsolate owners themselves might have wandered into that loft and never suspected that their property was all about them in dismembered fragments.

Memling could not assist at this clinic, so he washed his wounds and borrowed a cap and a long automobile coat to cover his own rags. He reached his boarding house without attracting attention.

There Nellie awaited him in feverish anxiety. She gave him comfort, applause, and idolatry. They sat up to all hours talking of what they should do with all the wealth they had earned—and had only to collect.

The next day Memling was so thronged with pains that he could hardly stir. Besides, he was afraid to venture forth with his bleached hair and mustache. Nellie promised to fetch him a lotion warranted to restore hair to its natural color for repentant experimenters.

There was no need to destroy Major Kershaw's felt hat and frock coat. The hat was on the road intact and the tails of the frock coat were also there, interesting exhibits to the detectives, but unpromising as clues.

Meanwhile, Nellie resolved to visit Mr. Kirk in person and collect Memling's share of the spoil.

She found Mr. Kirk in a next-day mood. The morning papers had said nothing of the wholesale automobile burglary which was committed at an unseasonable hour for them. But all the evening papers had "six-o'clock



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## *The Wholesale Automoburglary*

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extras" out before noon, headlining the astounding felony. All of them announced that the detectives had found innumerable clues.

Nellie told Mr. Kirk that they always said that, and that it was rarely true. But Mr. Kirk was in a blue funk. This was the first crime he had ever committed outside the regular line of his garage, and he was so terrified that he sweat ice water.

When Nellie delicately alluded to her willingness to relieve him of "Doctor Boikley's" portion of the swag, he turned on her with a malevolent leer:

"Money, eh? He wants money, eh? For what? For getting me into this mess? Well, of all the nerve! No wonder your friend Doctor Berkley didn't come for it himself."

"I made him stay home, Mr. Koik, because he was wounded something awful in your soivice. The whole scheme was his."

"Yes, the scheme was his. But I backed it, didn't I? I put up the cash to keep him at a swell hotel. I furnished the men to do the job, and me and my men brought the cars back—and him, too. He couldn't have steered a baby carriage home."

"Well, as for that," said Nellie, in her most withering manner, "he wasn't asking for a job as a cheffure. He's not come down to that yet. And if it's his fare you want to collect for the ride, you can deduct that from his money, and I don't think he'd kick."

"You don't think he would, eh? And how much is his share, do you think?"

"Well, I can't tell exactly. He was to have half of all he got for you. He got you nine foist-class automobiles. At an average of four thousand dollars per that



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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would be—nine times four is forty-two, and half of that is twenty-five. But you know best what it is woith.”

“I guess I do know best. And if I give him this hundred-dollar bill, he’s blamed lucky to get it.”

Nellie made a desperate gulp for air.

“A hundred dollars! A hu—hu—— Have you got the face to stand there and offer him a hundred dollars when twenty-five thousand is comin’ to him? Have you? I ask you, have you?”

“I have. We got the cars here, small thanks to your friend. I paid all the expenses. I’ve got to give every one of my men a big wad or there’ll be a howl from that direction. I’ve taken those cars apart. I’ve got to sell the parts as the chance comes—a pair of wheels here—an engine there—a top in another place—a torpedo body some place else. I may be a year working all those off.”

“But that’s your business. You got ’em for nothing. You sell ’em for a heap. The agreement was that you should give him half the value of the cars.”

“What if it was? What’s an agreement with a thief? What you going to do about it, anyway? Tell the police? I guess not. You better take this yellowback and vanish or I won’t give you anything at all.

Nellie sat like a statue of meditation. The infamy of the man nauseated her. It undermined her last faith in human honesty.



### CHAPTER XLII

#### THE READY ANONYMOUS LETTER WRITER

**A**LMOST automatically she reached out, took the crisp new bill, shoved it into her purse, and groped her way from the building as if it were midnight. She wanted to cry, but she was too deeply grieved. She wanted to go to Memling and tell him what a blackguard he had enriched, but she couldn't face him with such heart-breaking news just yet.

She dropped on a bench in the park and sat smothered with despair. Suddenly she shivered with an idea, laughed aloud, hastened to a stationery store, bought a pad and pencil, returned to the park, wrote furiously for a while, with as much scratching out and rewriting as a real authoress.

Then she made haste to the Kirk garage again. She met Mr. Kirk just setting forth in an automobile—one of his really own. His success in browbeating Nellie out of Memling's money had dispelled his gloom. He was so radiant that he beamed on Nellie and lifted his hat with the profound homage one pays to the hopelessly weak.

She motioned him back to his office with an insistence that he obeyed wonderingly. He dismounted and followed her in, as if he were her guest. She seated herself with authority, and said:

"Mr. Koik, I been doing a little think, and I thought I ought to tell you about it. You've got such nice ideas of what one partner owes to another that I don't want to do anything you might not like. I was wondering if



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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you would think it would be unladylike for me to send a little letter to Mr. Galkin and the other eight gempmen whose cars you got up in your hayloft."

"I don't understand," said Kirk. "Why should you send a letter to these owners? They don't know you."

"Oh, I'd send it anonymous," said Nellie. "But read it foist, and see what you think would happen if I sent it."

She handed him a page from her tablet, and he read:

DEAR SIR: Last night one of your ottomobiles was stole by force from your cheffure. You may be interrested to know where it is. If you was to look in the third-story loft of Mr. Homer Kirk's garadge, you would find it. It may be carved up some. But it's all there. Mr. Kirk was in on the whole game, and he expects to sell your car on the instalment plan as fast as he can work off the pieces. Modesty forbids me to sign my name, but you're entirely welcome. Don't mention it. Yours respectably,

A WELL-WISHER.

Kirk read the letter, read it twice, glared at Nellie wrathfully, glared at her again with curiosity.

Nellie looked up at him with the wide eyes of guileless innocence, and murmured timidly:

"Is the grammar all right? If you like that model, I can write off nine copies of it in no time."

Kirk saw the situation in its entirety now. He waited no longer—he simply threw up his hands and said:

"You win. How much?"

"Why, Mr. Koik!" cried Nellie. "Don't you like my little letter? Don't you want me to send it? Or was you afraid I was going to ask you to pay the postage?"

"How much?" Kirk roared, like a netted tiger.

"Well, you've already paid us a hundred dollars on



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## *The Ready Anonymous Letter Writer*

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account. If I was to moimur twenty-four thousand nine hundred, what would you say?"

"I'd say, take the garage," said Kirk.

"All right," said Nellie. "I guess we could run it about as good as a soittain party I won't name."

There ensued a lengthy parley, in which Nellie grew more and more relentless the more Kirk threshed about in his fetters. He saw that he was absolutely in the power of the gloating little woman, and that she knew it.

"I could put your business on the blink poimant, Mr. Kirk. And I'll do it, too. I hate to see even a woim squoim—but when it's a snake, it looks like my Biblical duty to grind my heel in. Besides, you was so proud of toining the icy eye on me when I asked for Doctor Boikley's fair share, that every drop of blood I squeeze out of that toinip you call a heart is so much Christian charity. Now, come down with the cash, and come down good, for I've got your number, and I can run you into the big garadge up at Sing Sing for keeps."

The upshot of it was that the agonizing Kirk wrote out a check for twenty thousand dollars and hurled it at her. She looked it over cynically and said:

"Is it soitified? How do I know you got funds in that bank?"

"Do you distrust my business honor?" thundered Kirk.

"Oh, my Gawd!" was Nellie's comment on his heroics. "Send out and get this in legal tender, and see that the money's good. I'll wait."

She waited. Kirk required some time to produce the cash. He had to call in partners and accomplices and drain their accounts dry as well as his own. The best he could total was ten thousand dollars and Nellie preferred this to any further delay or any proffer of notes and secu-



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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rities. She was fiendishly deliberate in studying the bills.

"You got so many things in this phony garadge," she said, "I shouldn't be surprised if you did a little engraving on the side."

At length she was convinced, and she carried her loot home with her, leaving Kirk in the general condition of a hopelessly flat tire.

She found Memling pacing the floor in wild anxiety. When she spilled the treasure before him he almost swooned. And now once more their talk was of an honest future.

The detectives are still looking for those automobiles, but without success thus far.

A remote echo of the event was heard in far-off Palatka. One day the sheriff of that marble metropolis walked up the streets with unusual dignity. He had had a telegram from the "chief constable" of New York City.

Arrest beauregard kershaw for crime committed in new york last sunday he is tall lean dark long-haired calls self a major.

The Palatka marshal had answered with the withering contempt the outer world feels for New York's hopeless ignorance of everything worth knowing:

CHIEF OF POLICE, New York, New York.

You durn fool beauregard kershaw aint been to new york for two years him and I was fishing sunday after church besides beau is a colonel short fat and a bald blond.

And he sent it collect.



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## *A Slump in Hopes Preferred*

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### CHAPTER XLIII

#### A SLUMP IN HOPES PREFERRED

MEMLING had promised himself and Nellie a gorgeous wedding ceremony and a honeymoon abroad with an honest life ahead, but however To-morrow promised, To-day always went into bankruptcy.

The nymph had brought little but heartache; the cinematographic triumph had ended in poverty; the automoburglary had resulted in bruises and dissatisfaction.

There was much money in bank, but it was far from enough to endow a life of ease and dignity and Kirk had been so tied up by Nellie's financial raid on his cash that Wensome Willie and the other chauffeurs forced Memling to disgorge a large part of his proceeds.

"There's a conspiracy among honest people against the ingenuity of us others," Memling said. "I couldn't do much worse if I went to work."

"Oh, do try it," Nellie pleaded, for she revered Memling the artist, as much as she loved and forgave Memling the rogue.

So he rented a studio in a huge old building in West Tenth street, and set up in sculpture once more. But a laziness seized and paralyzed him. Commissions were not to be had and he lacked the energy to attempt new work without promise of a market. The ideal remained ideal.

One afternoon when Memling was in no mood for small talk, and the cigarettes were all gone, and he was too lazy to go out for more, Nellie left him, and wandered



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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up the stairs of the rickety rookery, knocking at various doors. But everybody seemed to be from home, and she had no answer till she pounded on the door of gruff old Fritz Sternberg.

He answered: "Go away, pleass—dammit!"

So she walked in.

Fritz had long ago given up painting his early Munich landscapes, which Memling described as "nature seen through a glass of beer." Being unable to sell new paintings of his own, he had drifted into restoring old paintings by other people. He had a knack for it, and by working incessantly managed to keep himself in kraut and cigarettes. Nellie found him frantically cleansing an ancient canvas.

"What are you doing, Mr. Stoinboig?" said Nellie. "It's none of my biz, o' course, and don't tell me if you don't want to, but what on oith are you doing? You're not rubbing out a painting, are you?"

"No!" snapped the old man, who read the *Evening Mail*. "I am not rubbing a painting owit; I am making a laundrying of my socks."

"Oh, pardon me!" said Nellie. "Much obliged for the inflammation. Au revoyer!"

"Make the door to chently ven you go owit," said Sternberg.

Nellie stared at him with mingled wrath and amusement.

"Well, since you're so oigent about it, Fritzy, I *will* sit down," she said, and proceeded to stand at his elbow.

"Don't fill up the light, pleass," said Sternberg, giving her a shove. "Do you think you are a lamp?"

"Well, of all the old Joiman hospitality!" said Nellie, moving round to the other side. "It looks like good woik



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## *A Slump in Hopes Preferred*

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to me, except for the dame's general lack of duds. What ails the pitcher?"

"Yes," said Sternberg, and went on scrubbing.

"Now she's doin' the vanishin' act like she was a magician's helper. I was a medium once. Yes, I was!" This statement evoked no response, even when she added "Honestogawd," so she shrugged her shoulders jauntily, and said: "Well, if you insist, I'll tell you all about it. Say, for the love of Mike! There's another pitcher under that one! What is it—a landscape, or a cowscape?"

"Yes," said Fritz.

"Maybe it's a bit of still life?"

"I vish you are a still lifer, dammit!"

"Oh, you do know a coupla other woids besides yes, don't you?"

"No!"

She bent closer, her pretty face so near to his that her hair tickled his nose, and he sneezed.

"Vill you pleass take that hair of yours owit of my face, and go home mit yourself?"

"Soitan'y not, Fritzy. A coupla soitan'y nots. You got me int'rested, and—oh, I see it now! It's a coupla cows standin' in a pond and chewin' nearmint gum, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, what on oith do you wanta rub out a beautiful dame, all dressed up in her own figure, for, when what's left is on'y a coupla tons of beef dressed in cowhide?"

"Yes."

"Say, Fritzy, is this the old Heidelboig way a poifect gempman treats a poifect lady?"

She buttonholed him, and swung him round. His eyes blazed at her from a shag of hair and beard.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"Hello! *Was zum Teufel!*"

"I'm not talkin' on the long-distance phone, you know; I'm right with you."

"I see you, but vat is loose?"

"I was astin' you why you was rubbin' that gorgeous nymf' off the slate when all there is underneath her is a pair of cattle?"

"Because the nymf' was painted by some poor *Kleckser*, and the kettle were painted by Paul Potter."

"Paul Potter—the play writer that made Trilbies famous? Since when was he a paintist?"

"This Mr. Potter was a Dutchman who flourished—flourished two hunnerd feefty years back, and he was a great chenius."

"Well, what's the use of flourishin' two hundred and fifty years back? I'd rather be the Mr. Paul Potter that's flourishin' now."

"Well, since you have no possibility to be eeder of de famous Herren Potter, vill you pleass go home once, and mind your own verdammte beezness?"

"Watch out now, Fritzzy, or you'll insult me in a minute. Say, that's comin' out wonderful, ain't it?"

"Vill you keep your hair my eyes owit?"

"How'd you like my hair this way? It's the latest—à la mud, from Paresis."

"Oh, *geh' zum Henker*, Nellie! My nice, sveet Nellie, pleass go chump in the ocean!"

"Well, don't push me, whatever you do! I'm goin' as fast as I can. Say, just look at that! Those cows are comin' out of nothin'—sumpum like the way I saw a negative developed once in a dark room. That artist wasn't so anxious to throw me out as you are, Fritzzy. Fact is, I had to threaten to bat him over the head with



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## *Fritz the Pfiffig*

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his own red lamp before he'd leave me go at all. Those photographers are awful devils, some of 'em. Did you ever notice that?"

Old Sternberg put down his materials with a wild glare of apoplexy, went to the door, and howled down the stairs:

"Memlink! Oh, Memlink! Oh, Memli-ink!"

Soon a voice came faintly from below:

"Well, what's the matter?"

"Come up here once, vill you, right away, kavick?"

The tone of distress in his voice brought Memling hurrying up the stairs to the rescue. He came in panting and anxious.

"What's the matter, Fritz? *Was ist los?*"

"One of your models is loose, and she strayed in here. Take her away, and put handcuffs on her feet. I gotta vork, and she's gotta talk. You could silence her as easy as Niackary Falls."

Nellie winked at Memling, and said:

"The fact is, Doik, this old villain loored me in here, and won't let me go; he has been makin' vi'lent love to me."

## CHAPTER XLIV

### FRITZ THE PFIFFIG

**I**F wrath could have exploded Fritz Sternberg, he would have gone through the skylight like a rocket. He began to send out German appeals to the devil, the hangman, the heavens, the weather; he pulled hair and whiskers with both hands. Memling tried to quiet him and explain that Nellie was never to be taken literally. But Fritz stormed on:



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"*Hilf Gott!* Now I got two of 'em! Und de lock is broke on de door. Go home, pleass! I gotta restore dis picture. I can't leaf it."

Memling put up his hand.

"Go right on; don't mind us."

"If I could get dat fat policeman up so high as dis, I bet I'd have some solitood here."

Memling put his arm around the old sputterer, led him to his work, and flattered him back to joviality till he was chuckling:

"Dat Nellie, she beats me! Ven she can't t'ink of anyt'ink else to say, she puts her face down on my vork and tickles my nose till I'll be rubbing it two weeks more yet, and von't rub the tickles owit."

Nellie had to explain the wonderful work Fritz was doing, and she got it all wrong, about the lady who was being evicted from the canvas to make room for a flock of cows.

At the name of Paul Potter, Memling grew excited. Like most sculptors, Memling painted a little for diversion, and to express the color and background he was denied in marble. Paul Potter was one of his gods, of course.

"How in Heaven did they suspect that there was an old master like him under the daub?"

"Nobody suspected it. It was me found it. They vant this lady's portrait restoret. She was peelink off a little, the lady; and they esk me to touch up the paint."

"Every lady's got to be repainted once in so often," said Nellie; but Fritz ignored her.

"Underneat' the corner I find the sicknatoor of Paul Potter. It makes me such an excitement I cannot help peelink more yet."

"But how did a Paul Potter ever get painted over?"



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## *Fritz the Pfiffig*

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"You see, some smearer of a fellow who doesn't know who Paul Potter is, vat a greatness he's got, he needs a canvas. He just takes this, and don't stop to scrape off the cows. He just paints a lining over it, and slaps on this *erschrecklich* study in the nood."

"It's a sacrilege," said Memling indignantly. "But isn't it absolutely ruined? Do you think you can remove the daub without removing the Paul Potter, too?"

"How could I be doing it if I couldn't do it?"

"That's wonderful—you're wonderful!"

"You don't have to tell me. I know I'm wonderful. I am very *pfiffig*."

"Come again," said Nellie. "You're very what?"

Fritz blustered: "*Pfiffig*, I said!"

"Do it again for Mr. Memling. Listen once, Doik! Stand over here a little out of the way. Now say it again."

Fritz roared: "I said it twice—*pfiffig*—*pfiffig*!"

"Ain't that woid a peach, Doik? I gotta use that—*perfiffikh*. Oh, I tell you the fella that wrote the Joiman language musta handed himself a good laugh—*perfiffikh*! It's so convenient, too, when you got a cold or hay fever. You can clear your throat, and go right on talkin'. Proceed, Fritz, you're all to the *perfiffikh*."

But Memling was serious.

"How do you remove paint from paint, Fritz? Is it a secret process?"

"Not very. It's pooblished in some books, but those books is not best sellers yet. Over there is a book or two—— Can you read the French lengvitch?"

Nellie flared up:

"Can he read the French langwidge? Why, he owns the American rights!"



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Memling consulted a few volumes dumped in a corner.

"May I borrow these?"

"Do I get 'em back?"

"I said 'borrow.' "

"Dot's vat they all say!"

"Oh, I'm very eccentric. I return what I borrow."

"Get out vit 'em."

"I'm not robbing you?"

"Me! I know all dose books has, and lots more besides."

"I'll take these three. Much obliged. Good-by."

"I'll be much obligeder if you take Nellie mit."

"No, thanks, Fritz, I can't stay," Nellie burred.

"Just as much obliged, but I can't stop. Oh, don't think of making tea. Aw revoyer!"

She slipped out just as Fritz threw one of his shoes at her. As it clumped against the door, she said: "Nice old Joiman, Fritz!"

But Memling's eyes were so deep in the books that Nellie had to take his arm to keep him from stepping off into space.

"Watch out, Doik; you'll shoot the chutes in a minute. Whattaya wanta read books like them for? They got no more plot than a time-table."

Memling answered:

"I've got one of the greatest ideas of modern times, Nellie."

"Is that all?"

"Come in and sit down while I tell you about it—in a few words."

"In a few woids? Good-by to my hopes of bein' took to dinner! I'm in for a talk Marathon. But wait a



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## *Fritz the Pfiffig*

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minute—sumpum tells me I forgot sumpum. What was it I went up to Fritzzy's for? I'll go ast him."

"Better take this Zulu shield."

"Oh, I remember! It was cig'rets! We're all out of cig'rets, ain't you? And I started up to rob Fritzzy. He always has 'em, because he can't smoke 'em till he quits woik. Whilst I was there I got so int'rested in watchin' him currycomb that dame I forgot the cig'rets. I tell you, art is an absorbin' thing, ain't it, Doik?"

But Memling was absorbed in the books. And Nellie lightly ascended the stairs once more, buoyed up by the vision of the fury of Fritz when he saw her again. The vision did not disappoint her.

Even Memling heard him bellow. When Nellie came back she was triumphant.

"What did you say to poor Fritz?" said Memling.

"I pushed the door open, and I says: 'Mr. Stoinboig, it is my stoin duty to inform you that I cannot be your wife. I was greatly comp'mented by your proposal, but I love A Nother.' When I got that far, he was comin' after me with a palette knife, so I says: 'Fritz, for the love of moissy, gimme a cig'ret!' And he slung the box at me. It's a tin box, and kind o' sharp where it hit, but it didn't come open, so I brang it along. When I left, I hoid him pilin' chairs and tables against the door. I guess I'll go up and tell old *pfiffikh* he'd better dress for dinner right away if he's goin' to take me to the opera."

"Let him alone! You'll stay here and listen to me. I've got an idea—it's the very——"

"I know; the greatest in the history of the woild. Go on—'pit it out in mamma's hand."

Memling was well used to Nellie's flippancies, and



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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knew well that they were but the little frothy ripples over a deep sea of devotion. He waited patiently in his big chair till she snuggled herself among a multitude of cushions on the divan and lighted his cigarette for him, and hers for herself, and found ash trays, and asked if there was a draft on him, and wouldn't he rather sit in the other chair, or would he have a cushion behind his back, and would he like a cuppa tea before he began to orate.

Finally she settled back, and said:

"All right; Mrs. Audience is here. Rise the coitain!"

Then he began:

"Many of the greatest inventions, Nellie, have been inspired by accidents. Great inventors are apt to be men who observe accidents and utilize them. I got an idea from what we saw up at Fritz Sternberg's studio. Now, what did we see there? We saw a——"

"You ast yourself a question, and then you answer. You're very polite to yourself."

"Shut up, Nellie, dear. We saw a masterpiece by a great painter painted over by a small painter. The masterpiece is brought to this country, and never suspected, never examined, till by chance the painting is sent to be cleaned of its accumulations of soot and dirt, and by accident a bit of the upper painting is chipped off, and reveals the signature on the lower painting."

"And the lower painting is higher art than the upper painting."

"Don't trifle, Nellie. Now, does not all this suggest something to you?"

"Yes, indeedy!"

"What does it suggest?"



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## *Fritz the Pfiffig*

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"It suggests that I'm ready to go to dinner whenever you are."

"Now, let us utilize this accident, set the force running the other way. What a stupid painter did through ignorance, and the stupid old Fritz upstairs did through accident, let us apply by invention."

"Say, Doik, a goil can't live on big woids, you know. I'll trade you all you're goin' to say for the privilege of losin' myself in a platter of Guffanti's spaghetti. That's the study in still life I like. Say, Doik, when I die, and you sculp me me monument, just have a nonyx pedestal upholdin' a big, immense plate of spaghetti, and write on it in Latin: 'She never could get enough of it till now.' I bet spaghetti would look fine in marble, wouldn't it? And it would drape nice around the column."

"If you don't keep quiet, you'll need a monument. You get nothing to eat till I tell you my scheme."

"I won't say a woid. Not a sound will I make. As for spaghetti, I spoin the very idear of it."

Memling was still eloquent in spite of her distractions:

"Listen, Nellie! You know that the demand for foreign paintings is tremendous in this country. It swamps the native artist so that he has to have a tariff wall to keep him from drowning completely. Works of art are charged a high duty. In the case of high-priced painters, this adds enormously to their cost. It limits their market just so far, and forces people of moderate means to buy home-grown paintings. And that, of course, is why it is maintained."

"Nevertheless, there is so big a market for foreigners that smuggling is always going on to get their works in free. It used to be easy to bribe an official, till the government started in to try to get honesty by bribing,



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too—offering so much for exposing smugglers that the smugglers themselves couldn't afford to raise the ante. There was one firm that had to refund about a million dollars of unpaid duties.

"Now, of course, it's possible to smuggle, and get help, and it always will be; but it's too dangerous to be a substantial business proposition. But suppose I went across the ocean——"

"Oh, Doik, don't tell me you're going to leave me!"

"Hush! Of course not—how could I? Suppose we went over there, and came back with about fifty great masterpieces neatly painted over with other paintings?"

"Well, wouldn't you have to pay duty on the other paintings, as well as on the other paintings that's underneath the—er—other paintings—— Say, unwind me, can't you?"

"No; and that's the glorious part of my scheme."

"You goin' to bribe the whole U. S. customhouse?"

"Not at all."

"You goin' to steal the customhouse and slip 'em through surreptitious?"

"Not at all—though that's not a bad idea for the future. To steal the U. S. customhouse! That would be interesting!"

"One thing at a time, Doik. You're goin' to steal all the old masters—yes, and then——"

"But I'm not going to steal any old masters. I'm going to buy new masters."

"Poor boy! The heat has went to your medulla obligato!"

"At least, I'm going to get somebody else to buy them for me, and then I'm going to paint other pictures



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## *Fritz the Pfiffig*

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over them, and come back to America, and tell the customs officers that I'm an American citizen, and I've been studying abroad, and these are some of my sketches and pictures rejected at the salons; and they'll look them over and see how bad they are and say 'Welcome home, little prodigal! Go right back to your papa, and ask him to give you a job in his cheese factory.' And I'll enter the country and vanish, and——"

"And get old Fritz Stoinboig to scrub your work off the woik of the other fellas, and then you'll sell the other fellas for all they'll bring."

"You have it to perfection, except that I shall not have Fritz Sternberg do the restoring. In the first place, he is too honest to approach."

"How do you know he's so honest?"

"Because, with all his knowledge of faking antiques and touching up chromos, and cleaning off real works of art, he is still poor."

"Bein' poor is no proof of bein' honest, Doik. You know that some of the woist crooks on oith don't know where the next meal's comin' from. I'll talk to Fritz if you want. He'd do anything for me."

"No, I'll not approach Fritz; because, if he's honest, he will denounce me to the authorities, and, if he's dishonest, he'll want a big share of the proceeds."

"But you don't know how to restore a pitcher."

"I didn't, but I do. This little book tells all about it. It's so simple a child could understand it. Listen. I'll read you a sample from this book. It's by Charles Dalbon, and it's called '*Traité Technique et Raisonné de la Restauration des Tableaux*.'"

Nellie rolled her eyes wildly. "Oh, how sweet! Did you say restaurant and tableaux? I've got a beautiful



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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tableau in mind of me eating about a million yards of spaghetti. Do I get it?"

"Listen. I'll translate a little of it as I go along." And he read it off as follows, translating the words just as they ran:

"In wishing to execute the de-varnishing of an ancient picture, the practician perspicacious well often perceives himself that the said picture has been outrageously repainted formerly by a restorator unskillful or improvised, who not knowing to reaccord the original tones or not wishing to give himself the pain, has found nothing better to do than repaint it in part.

"In the presence of a picture thus maltreated, there is not to hesitate. One ought without any fear to make disappear the coating obnoxious which in much of cases recovers a color primitive charming and not having no need but of light touches.

"Is that clear, Nellie?"

"Clear as mud! Say, do you like spaghetti better au gratin, or ar l'Italienny? Or what do you like best on it?"

"A mixture of alcohol and of essence of turpentine——"

"Toipentine on spaghetti! Oh, Doik, what are you saying?"

"I'm reading, and will you please omit that spaghetti?"

"That's what I'm doing, Doik. I'm omitting it hard."

"Listen, will you?" And he threw her a glare that almost impressed her.

"A mixture of alcohol and of essence of turpentine, in letting dominate the first liquid, is all indicated to uplift the repaints. If the color is tenacious and hard, the alcohol pure



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## *Fritz the Pfiffig*

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could be employed and the usage of the scraper would sometimes be necessary to the accomplishment of the work. The force of the mixture will be enfeebled step by step in proportion as one approaches the original color, in order that no alteration of that produce itself.

“Are you listening, Nellie?”

“I’m listening just as I did when I hoid Sara Boinhardt play ‘La Toscar.’ I listened so hard I sprained both ears, but I couldn’t understand anything but the gestures, and I was unsoitain about a lotta them.”

Memling waved for silence, and prepared to read on, but she waved back.

“If you’re going to restore anything, restore me quick, for I’m fading away.” She rose, closed the book in spite of him, brought his hat, set it on his head, and dragged him away, saying: “Leave those old masters be, and take care of this young missus.”

But all through the supper he was thinking over his campaign, and whispering his schemes across the table to Nellie, who was more interested in pursuing the evasive spaghetti round and round her fork.

“While you’re inventin’ so much, Doik, you’d oughta patent a way for taming spaghetti so’s a poifect lady could take her cargo aboard without ruining the appetite of everybody within sight.”

“There’s millions in it, Nellie,” said Memling earnestly.

“Do you think so?” she exclaimed joyously. “Millions in a spaghetti spear?”

He glowered.

“I’m speaking of my great smugglery scheme.”

“I suppose,” she retorted, “that, being an American citizen, your first ambition would naturally be to beat the gov’mment out of sumpum.”



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"Naturally. But I'm thinking more of the educational aspect. By enriching our native land with masterpieces in spite of itself, we shall be accomplishing a great achievement in the history of——"

"There you go as per usual," Nellie gasped. "You're always slippin' a little hypodoimic injection into your conscience. I bet if you stole the candy off a baby, you'd say it was for the educational value to the baby and to save it from future misery in its tum."

"Well, be that as it may, doesn't the idea of an ocean voyage stir you up?"

"I'm afraid it will. You see, Doik, I never cross on the ferry to Joisey City on a rough day without sufferin'. It would be a case of nightmare all night and mal de mare all day."

"But think of the reward—think of the money we'll make!"

"Maybe—and, then again, maybe not. But it seems t' me that we're sailin' a long distance to borry trouble, when there's such a plenty of it right near our reach. And sumpum seems to whisper in my year that we'll come home in the steerage, or ridin' on the trucks underneath the ship."

## CHAPTER XLV

### A DUEL WITH STRUBEL

EVERYTHING graceful, beautiful, and lovable on earth seems to have its ugly under side, as every useful thing has its abuseful phase. And the mirror of art devoted to revealing the world its own charms or its



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## *A Duel with Strubel*

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own truths has its dull quicksilver surface, where dust and microbes gather and flourish.

There seems never to have been a time when tricksters have not taken advantage of mankind's love of glass beads or diamonds, or statues or paintings, or antique what-nots. Among all the ancient line of æsthetical crooks, Max Strubel was hardly surpassed in instinct for what was good art, and for what was a good imitation of what was good art.

There were countless other financial paths he might have followed, many of which would have yielded him greater profits for less work and less risk, both of purse and of liberty.

Horse-racing would have been far more exciting, without greater risk; and counterfeiting would have been far more profitable, without greater danger.

But Strubel preferred to deal with painters and sculptors, and to deal with them crookedly. It was to Strubel that Memling had gone when he kidnaped the inartistic statue of the old Revolutionary general.

It was to Strubel that Memling prepared to turn now. He broached the plan as he and Nellie strolled back to his studio after dinner. Nellie was in a mood of spaghetti beatitude, but she found energy enough to oppose the idea of Strubel bitterly. She had never forgiven him for playing the yellow quitter, and leaving them to be ruined by the too great success of their cinematographic crime.

"But whom else have we to go to, Nellie, dear?" Memling pleaded patiently, for he had an almost superstitious respect for Nellie's intuitions.

"Why've we gotta gotta anybody?" she answered. "You wouldn't take old Fritzzy into the laundry work on your canvases for fear he'd want part of the money, and



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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yet you're gona take Strubel in. And you know that he lets you do all the woik, and all he asks is all the money."

Memling's reply was: "I repeat, Nellie, who else is there? We need a stack of money a mile high. Our steamer fare has to be found, and our living expenses in Paris for six months or more, and the market price of a lot of paintings, and our fare back to America."

"And you expect Strubel to make a cough like that? What do you think he is—Camille?"

"He'd cough his head off if he thought he could sell it. Especially if he thought he could sell it as somebody else's head—an ancient Greek, for instance."

But Nellie sniffed:

"Max Strubel's head would never be mistaken for ancient Greek."

The upshot of the debate was that Nellie could suggest no substitute, and she told Memling to send for him, but contented herself with a reservation:

"Mark my woids, Doik, in the foist place, he'll never send us abroad; and, in the second place, after he does, he'll never bring us back; and, in the thoid place, when we're back, he'll not market your pitchers; and when he does, we won't see a cent of what he gets for 'em."

"Admitting all that, we'll at least get to Paris."

"I'll believe Paris when I see it. Go on and telephone your Strubel. But make him come to you if you expect to get anything out of him, and take a high hand, or he'll send you over in the steerage, and check me at the old ladies' home."

Strubel answered the telephone in person. He suggested that Memling call at his office the next day. He could not possibly see Memling to-night, for he was going



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## *A Duel with Strubel*

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to the opera with some rich art fanciers. But when Memling calmly said he would not trouble Strubel, but would close with another big dealer he knew, Strubel said he would come over at once in a taxicab.

Before the slow street car had reached Memling's corner, Strubel had evidently realized that he was being led by the nose, and that he had lost the first move in whatever game was to be played. He entered Memling's studio in a grim humor, as much as to say:

"I'm here, but I left my pocketbook at home."

Memling and Nellie had been frantically discussing the best means of attack on the wily Strubel, and they were at loggerheads when he rang.

"I'll do a disappear, and retain anonymous," said Nellie as she fled.

Before he answered the bell, Memling called up Slinky Green at a pool room he haunted, and, in a low voice, told him to ring Memling's number in half an hour, and permit himself to be talked to; then, ten minutes later, to ring again; and again in five minutes.

Then he dawdled to the door, and admitted the anxious Strubel, greeting him with a friendly yawn.

"Sorry to drag you down here, Strubel, when the opera is so much pleasanter than the song I have to sing."

"And is not so expensive," interpolated Strubel.

"Oh, no indeed! You could have a box for several seasons on what my project will cost. But, as I was saying, I shouldn't have dreamed of dragging you down here if certain rivals of yours were not so impatient to close. But I said it wouldn't be fair till I had consulted you. I didn't give them your name, of course, any more than I'd give you theirs. There should be honor even among—artists and art dealers, Strubie."



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Strubel eyed Memling with the suspicious and anxious stare of the traditional bird charmed by the snake. He was fascinated and tempted in spite of his instinctive tendency to disbelieve everything. But it is impossible to disbelieve everything, for disbelief in one thing implies faith in its contradiction—and Memling was always full of contradictions.

Memling urged Strubel to drop into a chair and have one of Fritz's cigarettes. Strubel declined to put himself even under the obligation of smoke. He produced a burly cigar of his own—one that was meant to inspire terror. It suggested a policeman's club, and as he talked it swung up and down in his teeth like a bâton.

He draped one eyelid halfway over one eye, and, seizing his cigar violently with his teeth, emitted a growl that meant: "Go on."

Memling looked him over scornfully, and said:

"Not a bit like it, Strubie. You look like a cheap vaudeville actor's imitation of Napoleon or Czolgosz. You know that the only way a dub like you can make money is to invest it in something that real brains think up. The one kindness a poor genius can do a rich man is to show him a new way to spend a lot of money with a chance of getting some of it back. Now, I'm going to offer you such a chance, because I owe you a grudge and you owe me an apology. So I'm going to give you a chance to support Nellie and me in Paris or thereabouts for, perhaps, a year, and intrust me with a heap of money besides. You won't take the chance, but later, when you're kicking your fat self all over town, just hand yourself a couple of good swift kicks for me, and imagine me saying: 'Well, I gave you your chance.'"

Strubel brandished his cigar threateningly.



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## *A Duel with Strubel*

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"Get to it! Get to it! What's it all about?"

Memling gave him a scenario of the plot as he had sketched it to Nellie. He added:

"And incidentally, while I'm over there, I might steal a number of great ancient masterpieces, paint them over, smuggle them through, and later you can sell them to some private collectors who will keep them in the dark."

"They beat you to the Mona Lisa," Strubel grunted.

"Yes, and it's a shame. Maybe some of those ever-present copyists that always hide the best pictures in the Louvre, painted her over, and carried her off as a copy of the adjoining picture. Maybe some private owner is gloating over his ill-gotten treasure now. I might steal you a couple of Raphaels and a Velasquez or two."

Strubel answered: "Not for me; it's dishonest."

Memling smiled. "What a rotten actor you are, Strubie!"

Strubel almost dared to get actually angry, but he substituted ridicule:

"All you want me to do is to keep you and Nellie in comfort till you get tired, and then it's up to me to sell the pictures you steal."

"Naturally. Don't you like the scheme?"

"I like it so well that I'll give you the easy end of it. You stay here and scrape up the expenses, and I'll go over and be art student, and bring back my studies."

Memling's look was still more frankly scornful.

"Strubel, you know that if you ever appeared at the customs, and claimed to be an artist, a laugh would go up that would swing the Brooklyn Bridge off its hinges. They'd get diamonds out of you if they had to use a stomach pump. You look less like an artist than anybody



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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on earth. Pardon me a minute; the telephone is ringing."

Memling went to the telephone, and when Slinky's voice sneaked across the wire: "Hello, guvnor; here I am!" Memling spoke to him as if he were a firm of importers:

"Hello, Mr.—er—I recognize your voice, of course. Yes, he's here; he came all the way from White Plains to try to get the chance to back my scheme. Well, I haven't told him your offer yet, and if he doesn't raise your bet I'll certainly give you the first chance. You might call up later."

Memling hung up the receiver, and winked at Strubel.

"Pardon my taking you in vain. Of course, I know you won't pay any price for the scheme, and I'm just trying to boost the other fellow."

"How do you know I won't beck it? How much does the other firm offer?"

Memling gave him so high a figure that he almost rolled to the floor.

He told a hundred reasons why the scheme was futile, and Memling knew he had him. When Slinky called up again, Memling, announced to the imaginary dealer that he thought he'd have to take his figure, as his other friend would not go so high.

Strubel broke in with wild gestures that Memling ignored. When he hung up again, Strubel said:

"Those fellers got no mazuma. I'll beck you, but I won't send Nellie."

"Oh, yes, you will," Nellie said, coming frankly forth from the eaves where she was eavesdropping.

"For why shoul't I sent you?" Strubel demanded.

"Because Doik will have to have a model, anyway,



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## *The Angel on the Front Cloud*

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and I'm not goin' to let him paint those French ladies. In the second place, Doik needs a noisse or somebody to take care of him. In the thoid place, I'm goin', anyway."

Strubel refused to give down, and Nellie refused to give up. At the height of the deadlock, the faithful Slinky rang the telephone again, and Memling was just consenting to close the deal with him when Strubel threw up his hands, assented to pay Nellie's expenses also, and a salary as "noisse," and hoped that the boat would sink with her.

Then Memling graciously commanded Strubel to get the steamer tickets, insisted on the best or none, and bade him good night.

### CHAPTER XLVI

#### THE ANGEL ON THE FRONT CLOUD

**I**F anybody with a sense of humor ever gets to heaven," Dirk Memling was saying, "he ought to hunt for a seat on a front cloud, where he can watch the funny farce that's going on down here."

"Don't distoib yourself about angels, Doik," Nellie answered; "you take a seat on the front of this infoinal trunk, and see if I can lock it. We're bound the opposite way from heaven—Paris."

Memling sat on the trunk, and Nellie tried in vain to snap the clasps.

"Can't you make yourself a little heavier, Doik? Seems to me you're sittin' awful light."

Memling endeavored to make a sledge hammer of



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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himself, and eventually the gaping jaws of the trunk closed, and Nellie fastened them together before they could get away. She sank back on the floor, gasping for breath, and Memling went on, musing aloud:

“As I was saying, we must be an awful joke from an angel’s eye view. You know that the farce that makes the audience laugh the hardest is the one where the actors take themselves most seriously and get themselves into the most trouble, misunderstand each other, come in at the wrong door, and all that sort of thing. Just think what a treat the audiences away up above the nigger heaven must have watching us flounder.”

“Maybe the audiences up there ain’t as crool as we are,” said Nellie. “Maybe they feel sorry for what hoits. Maybe the angels don’t laugh when a poisson’s feet slip out and they land on the back of their neck.”

“Maybe not,” sighed Memling, “but heaven must be a solemn place, then; for Heaven knows what we’d laugh at on earth if we didn’t laugh at other people’s blunders and bewilderments. The educated man even learns to laugh at his own.”

“Well, then we hadn’t otta ever stop snickering,” said Nellie, “for Gawd knows we simply skip from one tangle to another. And now come and help me tie up these steamer rugs. I lost us the steamer once before on account that Joiman waiter we stole the fiddle for. For He’m’s sake, don’t you lose us this one.”

They caught the steamer—the great *Morganatic*—in good season, saw all their luggage bestowed aboard, and stood staring at New York for a farewell gloat, when things began to happen that must have made the angel on the front cloud sit up and take notice.

Nellie had just finished saying: “Doik, there’s a



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## *The Angel on the Front Cloud*

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soitain sumpum that tells me this is too good to be——”

And then Nellie's finger nails nipped Memling's arm till he yowled. Gold-tooth Lesher was coming up the gangplank. He saw them, and spread them a glittering smile.

The gaudy pattern of his clothes, his ostentatious prosperity, and his overbubbling joviality promised them humiliation enough; but there was a grave danger in his company.

“If he goes on the same boat with us I'll jump overboard!” Nellie stormed. “He's got a tongue as long and as loose as the ocean. He gave us away once before, and the first day out he'll 'a' told everybody on board everything he knows.”

“But what can we do?” Memling wailed. “I can't throw him off.”

Nellie thought fiercely. Then:

“I gotta idea that's simpluh supoib! Loor him ashore, and lose him.”

“How? I'm not much of a lurer.”

“Offer him a drink at one of those gilded saloons on the water front.”

“But there's a café on board.”

“Tell him it's a temperance boat. He'll believe you. Tell him you forgotta lay in a stock of wetttables.”

“But suppose I get left, too?”

“You can't get left. Just show him a saloon, and he'll go to it. Then you cut and run.”

“All right. But it's taking a desperate chance.”

“If he's left on this boat we won't have a chance—even a desprut one.”

Gold-tooth had reached them now, and he overwhelmed them with his effusion. He explained his presence proudly,



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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and with much evidence of the importance of teeth in articulation.

"I'm on my way to Franshe," he said. "All good horshe-rashing is did in Franshe now. In America the horshe is a dead dog—dead by act of legishlasher. I'm goin' to Franshe to follow the rashes. Don't know a word of Franshe language, but I can undershtan' language of horshe's hind legs as good as anybody. What you sho shour about, guvnor?"

Nellie gave the reason: "He's just found out that this boat is a prohibition boat. No drinks served for seven days."

"Oh, Gawd!" Gold-tooth groaned. "And I ain't got sho mush as a flashk."

"Mr. Memling was just going ashore to lay in a little private stock," Nellie murmured.

"Lay in enough for me," Gold-tooth pleaded.

"I'm afraid I couldn't carry that much," Memling suggested.

"Better go with him," Nellie hinted.

"Exshellent idea!" averred Gold-tooth, and he took Memling's arm. Nellie's triumph was somewhat marred by her view of the desperate grip Gold-tooth kept on Memling's elbow.

Seeing that Gold-tooth had left his hand luggage at her feet, she got a steward to set it ashore. Then she went to her own stateroom to see what a stateroom looked like.

The bugles and the cries of "All ashore that's going ashore!" came faintly to her. She was watching through a porthole for Memling's return. She could catch only a glimpse of feet hurrying up and down the gangplank. She hoped that two of those were his.



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## *The Angel on the Front Cloud*

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As she went back to the upper deck, there was a sense of motion under her feet. She wondered where Memling was—looking for her, no doubt, as she for him. She cast her eyes in a farewell gaze over the masses of heads and blurring faces. Down in the heart of the great pier she saw a man moving. It was Memling. The tenacious Gold-tooth Lesher had been too much for him.

Memling, frantically running to the various openings of the pier, and finally to the platform outside, kept shouting something to the frantic Nellie. But the clamor of whistles, tugs, and cheers blotted it out.

She ran to the various officers, all of them very busy and brusque. One of them at last spared her the time to tell her that she could go back on the boat that dropped the pilot.

Memling, in a ferocious frame of mind, with self-disgust and alarm for Nellie, raged and yelled; then turned back, wondering what to do. He would send her a wireless that he would take the next steamer, and she was to wait for him at the Grand Hotel in Cherbourg.

It was now that the farce began to unroll before the front-cloud spectator, and Memling and Nellie played it with all that tragic earnestness that makes good farce.

Memling might have chartered a taxitug and caught up with the monster as it slowly wallowed down the bay; but, not being a millionaire, he no more thought of a tug than of hiring an aeroplane to drop him on the deck. He was not thinking of much, in fact, except profanity that might express his disgust and his dismay.

In his panic, he learned that another ship, the swift rival, *Kaiser Heinrich der Kleine*, was sailing from another pier, a faster ship that left half an hour later than the



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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*Morganatic*, and was due to arrive out a day earlier. By a mighty burst of speed, Memling caught it.

He got aboard just before the gangplank came ashore. At almost the same moment Nellie was shuddering down a flopping ladder to a bobbing pilot boat on her way back to New York.

### CHAPTER XLVII

#### "AT SIXES"—

IF Memling had been a little cleverer, or a little less clever, and if Nellie had acted just t'other way around, she would have remained aboard the *Morganatic* and met Memling at Cherbourg, or he would have stayed ashore and met her when she got back. But if human beings could foresee what other human beings are going to do, the world would be everything that it is not. And so long as people go on doing what they do, instead of what they should have done, complications will continue to furnish us historians with important chronicles like this.

As soon as Memling came to pay for his new berth on the *Kaiser Heinrich der Kleine*, he realized that he had deposited his letter of credit and most of his cash with the purser of the *Morganatic*. Thus it is that admirable foresight is often as fatal in its consequences as careless neglect.

Also his entire baggage was aboard the other ship, and all his wardrobe except what he had about his person. This was a dilemma, indeed, to the exquisite Memling, but he trusted to fate to show him a way to buy, beg,



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“*At Sixes*”—

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or borrow changes of linen. He did not care to steal them, because he was on his vacation.

He managed to dig up enough to pay for his state-room, but it left him in a state of financial stringency bordering on penury.

He went at once to the cabin of the wireless operator to send word to Nellie. His heart ached for her as he pictured her wringing her hands in helpless terror at her situation, alone on a strange ship bound for a strange land. So he wrote out this message:

MISS NELLIE GASKELL, on board *S. S. Morganatic*.

Will explain mishap later. Managed to catch the *Kaiser Heinrich der Kleine*, and expect to reach Cherbourg the day before you. Will meet you there. Don't worry. Best love.

D. MEMLING.

In the state of his pocketbook, he growled at having to pay for a four-word title for his ship, but he forgot this regret in his cordial appreciation of the charming invention of Mr. Marconi. The operator informed him that there were many messages ahead of his, but he would get it off as soon as possible. Memling set out to promenade the deck till he should receive an answer from Nellie.

He found it strangely pleasant to be prowling out into the Atlantic, lonely as he was. His stride had a lilt of youth in it.

Suddenly he caught a glimpse of Roger Van Veen just rounding the deck, and coming toward him. A gust of wind attempted Van Veen's hat, and his hand leaped to recover it. This gesture caught his eyes from Memling, and permitted Memling to side-step into the companionway, and parachute to his own cabin.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Van Veen had promised secrecy and nonpursuit, but he had not promised not to warn the ship's company, or the French police, to keep an eye on Memling.

In mingled fear and rage, Memling shut himself in his gloomy inside stateroom, and sentenced himself to a solitary cell for the whole voyage. He must pretend to be acutely and persistently seasick; and he would not dare venture out, except perhaps in the extremely late or extremely early hours. Memling threw himself on his bunk, and cursed his fate with the voluble eloquence of a sailor. The profession of the thief has its lonely hours like any other.

Thus cabined and confined, the time seemed trebly heavy while he waited for Nellie's answer. His wireless to her had been a long, long while on the hook, and the operator on the *Morganatic* was at lunch when the *Kaiser Heinrich* man first called him. He did not answer. By the time the *Morganatic* man had eaten his noonday snack and returned to his keys, the *Kaiser Heinrich* man had gone to his own mess.

Eventually, however, Memling's telegram hopped across space to the *Morganatic*, and being written down was carefully placed in the mail box "G," after a messenger had knocked on Nellie's door, and left a note beneath it to the effect that she would find a telegram at the mail desk.

But that wireless never reached its destination.

When Memling learned that his wireless to Nellie on the *Morganatic* had been received and acknowledged, he awaited an answer for what seemed a cycle of Cathay. Then he sent the steward aloft again, demanding the reason for Nellie's failure to answer. Hours more passed, and finally he grew alarmed. Wild notions spun through



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“*At Sixes*”—

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his mind. Nellie had fallen ill, Nellie had gone out of her head, Nellie had done almost anything that Nellie had not done.

At last he grew desperate enough to venture a telegram to the captain of the *Morganatic*, asking if Miss N. Gaskell had received a wireless from D. Memling, and, if so, why had she not answered. The captain turned it over to the first officer, and he to the second officer, and he passed it on to the chief steward of the dining saloon, who discovered that Nellie had not engaged a place at table, so he slipped it to the chief deck steward, who found to his horror that Nellie had not rented a steamer chair.

Eventually, the telegram was turned over to the purser, who placed it among the papers to be taken up in due order. Later a wireless came to the purser:

Are you all dead on board the *Morganatic*? Wireless telegrams to Miss N. Gaskell, and to the captain of your abandoned ship remain unanswered. Do you need assistance?—if so, send up a rocket—if not, please reply to my question. Why does not Miss N. Gaskell answer my telegram?

The alkaline bitterness of this stirred the purser to action, and he sent inquiries out in every direction. In overdue course of time, the question reached somebody who remembered helping a lady into the pilot boat.

Memling was chewing his knuckles on the inside of his inside stateroom when this message reached the *Kaiser Heinrich*:

Regret report before arrival your telegram, Miss N. Gaskell left in pilot boat, saying would return New York. Kindly wire what disposition you wish made luggage and safe deposit.

Purser, *Morganatic*.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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And now that Memling knew a little more, he was a great deal more alarmed, and twice as much distraught. Where on earth or ocean was Nellie now? And how under heaven was he to reach her? Pilot boats do not carry wireless equipment. Their ports and voyages are uncertain to the last degree. If he sent word to his studio—but that was locked up; to her boarding house—where was that? And would she go there? Would she be carried off by those pilots?

He trembled for her in such a crowd. She was pretty and indiscreet—of a type that men were forever approaching. He himself had never suspected the nobler side of her great heart till he had known her long and long.

His fantastic imagination speedily twisted “pilot” into “pirate,” and he saw her in the clutches of a buccaneer Morgan, or a Captain Kidd. His impulse was to leap through the porthole and run across the ocean till he found the rakish craft, board it, rescue Nellie, and scuttle the cursed vessel. But he did not attempt it. For one thing, he was in an inside stateroom, and there was no porthole; and if there had been one he could not have squeezed through it.

Of all the forms and follies of wishing, land wishes on shipboard are certainly the least profitable. When Memling had fatigued his temper by overexercise, he set about thinking calmly. Gradually he figured out that just what could happen, might happen. He saw Nellie arriving eventually at the studio, thinking that he had remained in New York. He felt that, failing to find him there, she would call upon Fritz Sternberg. Ergo, the thing to do was to wireless Fritzzy to look out for her.

And so he composed a message. It gave him new



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“*At Sixes*”—

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hope, and appeased his fiery temper, but it cast Fritz into despair, and kindled his temper to temperatures hitherto unreached. And this was the message:

Please find Nellie Gaskell when she returns to New York and tell her I am on board the *Kaiser Heinrich der Kleine* and help her to take the next steamer to Cherbourg where I will wait for her please help her to get funds somehow, and have her telegraph me here just when she sails, and on what boat I will gladly repay you for any expense, and be eternally grateful for any trouble you take.

DIRK MEMLING.

Dirk had composed this document with a rapturous pen, and had told the steward to have the toll charged to his account. He had not the faintest idea how he should pay the account before he landed, but he trusted to luck for that.

Fritz Sternberg was so deeply engrossed in using the last few moments of sunlight on a critical bit of work, that when the boy arrived with the marconigram, Fritz let him knock unanswered. When, at length, the boy sauntered in, with that perfectly-at-homeness of the messenger boy, and tugged at Fritz's elbow with a gum-chewn “Sa-a-ay, I got a messitch for——” Fritz rushed him to the door and almost had him thrown down the stairs before the lad extricated himself.

When Fritz read the telegram, it was Sanskrit to him. He signed the book, sent the boy away, and re-read the message. The last he had seen of Memling and Nellie was when they told him they were sailing on the *Morganatic*, to be gone three months. He had graciously answered:



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"Bone voyitch and goot riddance, and pleass to stay three years."

And now he got a message from Memling on the *Kaiser Heinrich der Kleine*, telling him to find Nellie when she returned to New York, and simply get her on another steamer and pay all her expenses. To Fritz, who was never sure of to-morrow's lager, this should have been a huge joke, but there was no such word as "joke" in the bright Wörterbuch of Fritzzy.

He read and re-read till the last precious drop of light had been squeezed out of the tube of day. Then he took the telegram to the sorrowful place where he drank his meals. He and various Teutonic friends discussed the message over their frugal repast of caraway seeds. They advised him not to "bodder his het over it."

But Fritzzy had the heart of a Sister of Charity under the manner of a man-hating hyena, and he answered:

"*Ach, gerechter Himmel*, a feller can get mad once and shvear a little, but if a nice feller like Memlink tells him a vireless to go find a nice girl like Nellie, he's gotta go find her, ain't it? But vere do I find her?"

One of his cronies suggested:

"You might go by de station house, und esk a *Schutzmann*."

But Fritzzy had asked policemen things before, and either because they did not like his accent, or he did not like theirs, the results had been unsatisfactory. He shook his head hard. Another beer friend had an idea:

"You should go hire a detector to detect her!"

Fritz shook his head harder: "Dose detect-stiffs dey don't detect nutting but how much money you got to spend. It don't take long to detect my money."



A third neighbor had a Bavarian inspiration:

“To-night you take a atvertizement to a paper; to-morrow he prints it; she reads it; dere iss it!”

But Fritz would none of these; he would go forth and find Nellie by pure force of will. He went forth, and he used up all the force he had. Midnight found him so exhausted that he could hardly creep into the studio building. He looked at the steps and groaned, sank on the first, and fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XLVIII

### —“AND SEVENS”

NELLIE had taken care of herself in a hard world too long to behave as Memling feared. She had spent but little time in the futile exercise of wringing her own hands. She had rushed hither and yon asking questions, till she learned that the pilot would be dropped into a pilot boat once he had conducted the ship to the outer water gates. And she had insisted on returning with him.

Nellie was not happy on the little pilot boat, for it made a mountain out of every molehill wave, and soon reduced Nellie to a state of grave anxiety as to her own table of contents.

She watched the huge black precipice of the *Morganatic* move on and dwindle to a sausage, and from that to nothing. Later she watched the *Kaiser Heinrich der Kleine* grow and lessen out of sight in pursuit; but she never dreamed that Memling was in one of its bunks, wondering why she did not answer his marconigram.



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To her physical uncertainty was added a sudden grave alarm, for the pilots on the pilot boat were many, and they wished to stay out at sea till each had picked up a ship to guide uptown.

One of them was reciting to another his experience in a pilot boat some years before when the big wind blew so hard that the boat was six days getting back, and on short rations at that. And he pointed now to signs in the sky that another big wind was gathering.

Nellie sat pondering the appalling situation. She pictured Memling wringing his hands on the dock in helpless terror, for to Nellie, Memling was a wonderful child of genius and misfortune who could hardly have survived for a day without her fostering care. The one thing for her to do was to get back to her lost child. The thought of spending several days on the ocean in the flip-flop, pitch-toss, roll, and slidder of that pilot boat was not to be entertained.

After a hasty debate, Nellie's faculties unanimously passed a resolution to get ashore at once. But Nellie's life was one of such crooked customs that it never occurred to her to go to the captain of the pilot boat and state the exact facts. Oh, no; facts would never do. She thought up another scheme, and advanced upon the more or less superior deck hand with that brand of siren charm which she supposed would most captivate a sailor.

"Cap'n—for you are the cap'n, ain't you?—ah, I thought so! On'y a blind goil would make a mistake as to who's who in this bunch. And you got a nawful cute little ship here, too. I could just sail on and on for all etoinity in a ship like this is, with a conductor—er—cap'n—like you on the front platform—er, whatever you call it."



“Why, thank you, miss; thank you. I’m much obliged, thank you.”

“Don’t mensh, commodore. But zize abouta say, I’ve gotta hotfoot back to New York, and while I loined to swim a coupla strokes down at dear old Coney Island, I never got to be no rival of Rosa Pitonoff, and I guess it would kind of stump a moimaid to swim from here to shore.”

“What in thunder did you get off the ship for, anyhow?” the sea wolf growled.

“You see, admiral, I suddenly remembered that I forgotta leave my canary boid with a soittain party I was goin’ to leave it with. And I was goin’ to get some boid seed, too, and I forgotta to do that, so I just hadda toin back.”

“Why didn’t you send a wireless?”

“That boid can’t read! He can’t even sing! So what would be the use of sendin’ a wireless to a songless?”

“I mean, why didn’t you send a wireless to somebody to go get the bird?”

“Well, now, do you know, I never thought of that. Ain’t I the silly? But it takes a sailor to think of things—a pilot especially. I suppose there ain’t any kind of men that has to think of so many things so quick as a pilot’s got to, is there?”

“Well, maybe not, miss, but I can’t afford to take you to shore now—not for several days—unless I could put you on some inbound liner.”

“When’s the next inbounder goin’ to bound in?”

“We’re expectin’ to pick up a couple to-morrow afternoon, if there ain’t a fog.”

“Oh, I just couldn’t wait. You’ve really gotta put me ashore, commodore.”



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"But I can't afford it, I tell you."

Nellie had a few dollars below her kneecap, but they would have made a poor showing as a bribe, and, besides, they would be vitally necessary to herself, so she said:

"I'd cheerfully reimboisse you for the extra expense, admiral, but unfortunately havin' left my valuables with the poisser, I—I can only offer you the undying thanks of one that has always spoke well of sailors, and especially of pilots. Oh, I think a pilot is——"

"Yes, I know, but——"

"Once you get me ashore, and I can hunt up my gentleman friend, he would cheerfully reim——"

"Maybe he would, and maybe he wouldn't."

"O' course, I could give you a check on the Foist National Bank, but my check book is on the *Morganatic*."

It took Nellie two hours of the most persistent wheedling to teach that sea wolf to eat out of her hand, and it would take two hours to describe her wiles and her dodges. When he fled to the cubby-hole he called his cabin, she followed him there, and perhaps, in view of her desperate needs, she may have overpowered him with a kiss or two and the promise of many more when he came ashore the next time.

But however that may be, the other pilots were eventually wrought to infuriation at seeing the prow turned landward. But Nellie went among them with such soothing speeches that the captain waxed jealous, and only the angel on the front cloud knows what battles were fought aboard that craft after Nellie left it in a swooping and slumping rowboat that shot her through the breakers and deposited her on the sands of Far Rockaway.

This was not unfamiliar ground to Nellie, but she was in no mood to revel in its festivities. She hastened to a



telephone booth to call up Memling's studio. She wished that she had sent him a wireless at that address before she left the *Morganatic*. But she had not thought of it.

It was a hot day for telephone-boothing, but Nellie sentenced herself to the stifling cell. That angel on the front cloud must have stopped laughing by this time, and begun to feel sorry for those two severed wretches groping through space for news of one another; Memling in a stuffy stateroom pretending to be seasick, and growing so, while he kept the steward running to and from the wireless room till the operator threatened the man's life; Nellie in the airless telephone booth, hammering the receiver hook, and nagging the central to keep ringing the old studio.

And the *Morganatic* speeding sublimely along with all their funds and clothes, except what Nellie had flung into her suit case, for the big trunks were in the hold, and the cabin trunks had not been lowered into the pilot boat.

After Nellie had berated the telephone centrals as a class and as individuals for their failure to obtain her number, she remembered that Memling had discontinued his telephone when he gave up his studio. She would have fainted in the booth if there had been room for a comfortable collapse.

But perhaps the telephone company had not removed the instrument yet. Heaven knew they were slow enough putting it in. And where else could she seek Memling? When he missed the boat he must have gone somewhere. He was probably sending wireless telegrams to her to come back—or to go on. He had probably wirelessly



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that he would follow on the next steamer—or had he? Would he or wouldn't he?—or what?

Here were two needles looking for each other in a haystacked world.

She pounded and stormed at the telephone. Once she got a "don't answer," and this confirmed her in her guess that the telephone had not been extracted. She made one more call, and got a "busy." This gave her vast joy; it meant that Memling was there, and probably telephoning telegrams to her. So, encouraged, she remained in the booth, fanning herself as best she could with the sliding door, while a line of other would-be telephonists fumed outside.

At last, however, she got a cold, final word from a line manager that the telephone was discontinued, canceled, and removed. This left her nothing to do but go back to town. She was faint with hunger and gaunt with anxiety. She ate a lonely dinner at a crowded restaurant.

Many men ogled her, many men smiled at her, one man asked her if the empty seat at her table was taken. She settled them all with little delay. She was anxious and angry, and she felt in no humor for refined measures, or ladylike timidities.

To the affable Lothario from Passaic who asked her, "Is this seat taken, kiddo?" she answered daintily: "You just try to set there and I'll soive you this plate of clam chowder across that poiple shoit you're sportin'."

It was hardly what Lady Guinevere would have said to a prospective Lancelot, but it accomplished its purpose, and that, after all, is the main thing. And later, when Nellie hastened to the train and met the knight-errant again, he erred rapidly to the other side of the street.

The train to town was loaded with the usual jetsam



of a day at the beach. Aside from the dejected mothers with the fagged children and the woebegone husbands, the rest were all hilarious and frankly spoony couples. Every young man's shoulder had two heads on it. Nellie wondered where her own third shoulder was. Among all her speculations, she never dreamed that a widening expanse of ocean was dividing it from her head.

She reached New York late. It was the same old New York of a dark, hot summer night. The studio was like a huge and empty oven. The janitor should have been sitting on the cellar steps in his shirt sleeves, and he should have stared at her with amazement, but the janitor had gone to South Beach for his outing.

The street was almost deserted, and the studio building apparently abandoned. It wore the loneliness of a ruined abbey in an unfrequented forest. She climbed the stairs to Memling's studio, lugging the suitcase, and rang the bell and knocked on the door. The clamor seemed only to disturb the solitude within.

She slumped down on the steps, and felt as lonely as a little sphinx in a desert of Egyptian gloom. At last she bethought her of Fritzzy Sternberg, whom she loved to tease, and whose ferocious outbursts of temper amused her so deliciously.

If worst came to worst, she would hunt down Strubel, but she hated him so enthusiastically that she postponed him as a last resort. She would seek Fritzzy, and make him help her find Memling. Fritzzy would rave against the interruption to his work, but it was his duty to aid her since he was the cause, however innocent, of the whole enterprise so ill begun.

She dragged her weary legs up the long stairs, and rapped on his door. There was almost a laugh of relief



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in her very tap. She listened smiling for his howl of rage: "I am owit; go away, dammit pleass!" But now the echo of her knuckles was her only answer.

The lock was broken, for Fritzzy never seemed to have the time or the money to mend it. She pushed the door open, and looked in. The skylight glimmered spectrally, and shed just enough illumination to emphasize the emptiness of the shadows. She called, and had no answer. She ventured in and stared at the cot whereon he flung his weary frame when sleep whelmed him. It was untenanted.

She sat down on a broken-legged stool, and waited till the loneliness affrighted her, and drove her back to the spooky hall. She slipped down the steps drearily to try Memling's door again. If she could force it she could sleep there on the cushionless window seat.

At the head of the flight of steps leading to Memling's floor, she paused. She heard footsteps coming up the stairs. It might be Fritzzy! No, that shifty shuffle was never made by his honest clodhoppers.

Whoever it was paused on the landing below, and fumbled at Memling's door, paused, knocked, and rang. Whoever it was was evidently drunk, and muttering thickly.

At length there was a sudden spurt of flame, and the flare of a lighted match. Like a tiny spotlight, it painted on the gloom the bleary face of Gold-tooth Lesher.

The slimy old scoundrel held the match close to the door, and Nellie felt a sharp thrust of fear that he was going to set the building on fire in revenge for Memling's trick in decoying him from the boat.

But Lesher's motive was not incendiary. The match burned his finger, and he dropped it with a wet-voiced curse, and stepped on it. He lighted another, and,



peering so close that he nearly set his own red nose on fire, he read:

“Dirk Memling, Shculptor; gone to Europe, back in shicksh monsh.”

Leshner let the match burn him again, cursed again, stamped it out, and vanished from Nellie’s view, but his voice came from the dark:

“Gone to Europe—tha’sha joke! If he did, he shwum it!”

Then she heard him stumble down the stairs, muttering.

Nellie sank again on the stairway, scowling at fate. It seemed that the only person discoverable in all the world was the one she least wanted to meet. She was afraid to leave the building yet a while, lest she run upon Gold-tooth Leshner. She was eaten up with curiosity as to what he had done to keep Memling from catching the boat, but she preferred to learn it from Memling.

So she sat pounding her mind in the effort to strike out some spark of inspiration as to where she might find Memling. Meanwhile, she would be waiting for Fritzy. He could not stay away forever.

The angel on the front cloud could have told her many things, but well-bred audiences do not call out remarks to the actors, however easily a word or two of information might solve the dilemma.

And so the angel did not relieve the tormented Nellie with a cool drop of information, though he might have told her that the reason she could not find Fritzy was that Fritzy could not find her.

Even when Fritzy came in and sank exhausted at the foot of the stairs, the angel made no sign. He may have



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had a smile out of the situation: Nellie on the top step asleep, waiting for Fritz; Fritz on the bottom step asleep, waiting for Nellie.

### CHAPTER XLIX

#### THE LOST IS PARTLY FOUND

**I**T was the janitor who set the stopped clock in motion again. Returning late from his evening's recreation, he stumbled over Fritz's feet, and ordered him to mount to his own domain.

The yawning German went aloft on all fours. Nellie was too tired to hear him. He found her with a sheaf of moonbeams caressing her through a hall skylight. She looked like a madonna, and his heart ached for her till she woke with a gasp of terror, recognized him with a drowsy smile, and murmured, to tease him:

"Well, Fritzzy, you didn't expect to find me waitin' at the choich, did you? Well, what'd you say if I told you I shook Doik and toined back to marry you, and settle down right here?"

This restored Fritz to his customary manner. He exploded:

"By golly, Nellie, I don't know how I ain't murdered you already. I am so glad ven you go across de ocean, I been singing songs about Nellie's gone to Europa—hooray! hooray! And now I gotta sing de cat is *zurückgekommen*."

She laughed and led the way into the studio, and told him to light a light and lend her a cigarette and take a chair, and when he had obeyed, fuming, she said:



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## *The Lost is Partly Found*

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"I'm lookin' for Doik Memling. I lost him. Have you seen him?"

"Have I seen him? I am a good see-er, but I can't see across a ocean."

"Ocean nothing! He lost the boat. That's why I came back."

Fritz searched his pocket, and found the telegram, handed it to her, and watched the effect of the news on her face. He saw bewilderment, astonishment, unbelief, horror, and panic chase one another about her features. She stared from the telegram to him and back to the telegram. Her first spoken thought was for Dirk.

"Poor Doik, how he musta worried. Wasn't it sweet of him to think of sending woid to you?"

"Ach, how sveet!" Fritz growled. "I am obliged to him for soch a sveetness. I got no foots left in my shoes because he is soch a sveeter. Vell, I did find you; he says go back to Europe. So go do it, yes?"

"He also says you're to foinish me with the funds."

"Me! I ain't got a single dam' fund. If I had money enough for to go to Europa, I'd keep it and go over mit myself."

"Do you know anybody who has any money to lend?"

"If I knewed somebody except a pawnbreaker, who could lend me something, I could use him myself."

"It looks kind of hopeless, don't it?"

"I'm full of hope you vill go home and let me sleep. I am asleep now."

"You're not going to toin me out at such a hour?"

"I'm going to turn you owit and turn me in."

"Not if I see you foist!"

"*Lieber Gott*, Nellie!" he cried in terror. "You don't sleep here, do you?"



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"O' course I do!"

"But, Nellie—*hilf Himmel!* Nellie, you——"

"Don't poitoib yourself, Fritzzy; you got no occasion to be afraid of me, and Gawd knows I ain't afraid of you."

"But, Nellie——"

"I could sleep standin' up, but, if you don't mind, this window seat is just the thing." She stretched her weary length along the frayed cushions. "I've slep' in lots of woisse places. I gotta get a little rest somehow so's to-morra I can figger out where I'm goin' to raise the cash to get to that Choiboig where Doik will be waitin' for me. Call me at se'm-thoity. Good night, Fr-z-z-z!" She was already asleep.

"Nellie, if you gotta stay here, take my *Bett*, pleass—I don't mind a chair. I like it—I hate to sleep in a *Bett*. Honest!"

There was no answer.

Fritz stared at her in stupefaction. Her temerity shocked him wide awake.

If the angel on the front cloud were not respectably asleep at this hour, he might have seen Fritz staring while the moonlight moved across the floor and spread a silver aureole about the beauty of the sleeping girl. A little later he would have seen the weary body shiver with the chill, and the dazed old painter take what had once been a Bagdad curtain from his own couch and lay it over her with a gentleness that did not disturb the deep and rhythmic breathing of her bosom.

Then Fritz stumbled to his couch, and lay there leaning on one elbow to stare at his strange visitor, till sleep pulled down his eyelids and his shaggy head, and the second curtain of the farce.



## CHAPTER L

### COFFEE AND ROLLS

NELLIE slept so thoroughly and so late that it was well on into the forenoon before she began to have nightmares of jumbled horror. She dreamed that she was suffocating in a telephone booth on board a pilot boat, which was trying to cut across the bows of the *Kaiser Heinrich der Kleine*. She could not get out to warn Memling to stop the ship. And she saw the vast bulk reeling through the waves, with its prow like a giant's razor, dooming the pilot boat to destruction.

The ship caught the little craft amidships, and shivered its timbers, hurling Nellie to the deck with terrific force.

She woke up with a scream, to find herself sprawling on the floor, and Fritz Sternberg gazing at her from the edge of his couch. She thought he was a life-saver in a lifeboat for a moment, and tried to swim. Her scream had scattered his slumber, and he was as puzzled to find her there as she to be there.

After a brief interchange of stares, their memories returned, and she began to laugh. Fritzzy almost smiled. She disentangled her feet from the well-shredded Bagdad, and said:

"Fritz, you gave me this coitain off your own downy, and you're soitan'y a poifec' gempman, if ever they was one. In retoin for your kindness, I'll get your breakfast for us. You go on out and buy a bunch of hen fruit, fresh from the cold storage, and I'll wash me face and set some water to boilin'. I see you got a tin cup and



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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a alcohol lamp—a regular artist's kitchenette. Is there any coffee in that paint-brush jar? Have you got the price of the eggs? 'Cause, if you haven't, I'll stake you if you'll toin your face the other way a minute."

But Fritzzy proudly denied his poverty, and sallied forth for the eggs. He stopped in a saloon long enough to scrub his face and hands. When he reached the heights again, he found Nellie and the alcohol lamp both singing pleasantly, and the aroma of coffee abroad in the room.

It gave Fritzzy almost an impulse toward matrimony to note how charming it was to find a pretty woman prettily cooking his breakfast. But Nellie began at once to tell him her plans:

"I got it all thunk out, Fritzzy; foist thing to do is to send that poor, blessed Doik a marconigram saying I got me feet on *terror foima*, and I've engaged a upper boith on the next steamer. Who is the next steamer, Fritzzy? Did you happen to get a morning *Woil'* or *Joinal*, no? Well, don't trouble to go down for it; I'll get one on me way out.

"Next, I'm going to call on Max Strubel, and strike him for me car fare across the briny. Do you know Strubel? No? Well, you're luckier than what you think. He thinks he's a turrible floit, but he's got the beauty and the charm of a tomatta woim, and I'd as lief have one for a companion. But I've gotta talk to him and be polite. You haven't got a coupla cannon and a tomahawk you'll lend me, have you? Well, then, how about that palette knife? You could clean it afterward if I had to use it on him."

Fritzzy was more and more appalled as Nellie unfolded her scheme. He declined to lend the palette knife, and



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## *Strubel at Bay*

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he implored her to keep away from Strubel. He promised that if she would wait he would get her a steamer ticket.

"What you going to poichase it with, Fritzzy? Joiman lessons? Or was you thinkin' of painting one for me? You know, Doik said to take the first steamer for Choiboig, not the last one. Don't you fret your dear fat old head over Strubel. I know him. I'm not afraid of him. I just kind of feel a loathing for him, like being close to a soipent."

None of Fritz's arguments could restrain her. She set forth to Strubel's art gallery, which occupied the larger part of what was formerly a residence on Fifth Avenue. It was too early for the class of customers whom Strubel's objects of art appealed to and she was ushered to his private office.

## CHAPTER LI

### STRUBEL AT BAY

A CANVAS just unpacked was set upon his desk. He snipped the last cord from the packing paper with a pair of shears. Then he stood off, admiring the painting. Then Nellie appeared. As he stared at her, his heavy eyes were shot with surprise.

"You are not on the *Morkanettic*?" he gasped. "Or are you your own ghost?"

Nellie briefly explained the situation. Strubel laughed hoarsely:

"Ah, vell, I did not vant you should go. Now Memlink is safe away, and my feskinatink Nellie is here vit me—yes? How beautiful you are! I vonder could I get a



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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refund for dose tickets! Sit down once! Ah, my pretty Nellie it is better you are here dan on de awful ocean. Memlink is fleertink now vit some other lady, and you have come to see poor old Strubie, yes?"

"Yes!" said Nellie coldly, evading the hand that reached for her.

"It is better Memlink should be by himself. He works fester. And I am anxious he should begin to send me pictures. Look at thees. I get it thees mornink by the gustomhouse. It is a chenuine Uzanne. Uzanne is the feshionable painter now. My agent in Paris pays feefty t'ousant francs—ten t'ousant dollars for thees paintink—and soch a leetle one! Just a lady's face smeared over a curtain!

"And I have to pay feeften percent duty on it. Feeften hundret dollars I hand over to that loafer of a Oncle Sam!

"If Memlink had been there he'd 'a' painted another picture over this, and call it his own vork, and bring it in free, and then we sponge off the Memlink and leave the Uzanne, and I make feeften hundret more profit. It is a good scheme.

"But let us talk about us, you and me, Nellie. There is not moch business now. Everybody is out of the ceety. You and me should be out of the ceety. What do you say to a nice leetle automobeelink to some nice leetle place?"

"I say, much obliged, Strubie, but I got another engagement." He raised his eyebrows. She added: "With Doik Memling."

He laughed. "It is a long-deestance engachment, yes—across the ocean, yes?"

"Yes," she said. "I'm sailing on the *Mutterland*



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## *Strubel at Bay*

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Thoisday, to-morra, and I've gotta tap you for the fare."

He regarded her with slyness: "Ain't you got the fare?"

Nellie shrugged her left shoulder. "Strubie," she said, "if Orient poils was sellin' at ten bones a bushel, I could just about poichase a stickpin."

Strubel rubbed his hands, as if he foresaw a triumph.

"You know, Nellie," he cooed, "I didn't vant you should go, and the because vy is because I—because I—vant you should stay. I lof you. Be my vife. I got such a loneliness since you left, I ain't got my right mind on me at all; only yesterday a fella nearly got a chenuine Besnard at cost price off me. Nellie, glatly vill I give you de fare across de ocean if you oh-promise-me to stay on this side—huh?"

He looked his prettiest, and seized her in his arms, and drew her gently to him. She pushed him away with rude energy. He caught her more fiercely, and smothered her in his fat embrace, and pursed all his lips to kiss her.

His murmurs of amorous content changed to a sharp yelp. She had picked up the pair of scissors from his desk, and had partly closed them on one lobe of his left ear.

He dared not move, but his arms fell from about her shoulders, and his mouth changed from osculation to trepidation.

"Don't move," Nellie said, "and don't grab my hand, for if I was to press more'n so hard, I might snip off one of your flappers. Now, Strubie, you're goin' tò listen to reason. I don't like you, and I'd rather a sea lion kissed me than you. If Doik was drowned, and you was the on'y man left on oith, I'd choose to be a old maid.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Do you get me? O' course, you don't get me, but do you? Now, back into the garadge and behave!"

Cold pearls stood out on Strubel's forehead, and he retreated without delay, rubbing his ear to make sure it was still there. But once out of her reach his fury came on him in a geyser.

"All right, I don't get you. Good! Now you get out, before I have the police take you out!"

Nellie's answer was an uproarious laugh of ridicule.

"Oh, Strubie, do you ummage I'll fall for that? You call the police, and toin me over to him! What would I be doin' in the meanwhile? What would I be moimurin' in the ear of that cop about the fake pitchers you got here? You know you ain't talkin' to some poor millionaire boob, Strubie; you're not pullin' your shop talk on a customer, but on a commoicial traveler in the same line. Bein' a lady, I just hate to keep a secret. If I once begin to poicolate what I know, this buildin' of yours will wear a sign sayin': 'To let on account of proprietor having went up the river a while.'"

"Who'd believe you?"

"They'd believe the canvases and the statues, and the things I could point out. Now, Strubie, you listen here a minute! I've came here to get my transportation, and I'll get it or I'll go through your reputation like a lorn mower. But before I tackle that, I'll give some of these pitchers a hair cut. This new painting by Mr. Ozone, or whatever it is, that cost you fifty thousand frankfurters, I like this. I think I'll just cut this lady's face out of this canvas so's it'll be convenienter to carry off. Don't come closer, Strubie, or the shears might slip."

He stared at her with such anguish of wrath that she felt almost sorry for him. She smiled:



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## *Strubel at Bay*

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"I'll tell you what I'll do, Strubie: I'll sell you this Ozone pitcher. I'll sell it cheap on account of proprietor bein' called to Europe! I'll let you have it for less than half the duty on it. Put five hundred in my mitt, and I'll exit laughing."

He called her every name he could think of, and he thought copiously. But the sight of those scissors of Damocles hovering over his precious canvas, and the knowledge of what blackmail Nellie could levy on him, brought him to terms. He worked at the combination on his safe several times before he heard the yielding click. He took forth an imposing bundle of yellow paper. Nellie regarded it with respect.

"Been gettin' your hay in, ain't you, Strubie? Slip over a coupla extra pitchforks, will you?"

"If I only had a pitchfork I could use it," he growled. "Dere is five century notes, and I hope the ship explodes you into mincemeat!"

"You're entirely welcome, Strubie, and I wish you many happy retoins of the day. I'll tell Doik how much we owe to your coiteous consideration, and we shall be etoinally your obedient soivant."

She scooped up the notes, counted them; snipped off a tiny corner of one of them, and chuckled:

"There's your commission, Strubie. Good-by darling!" And she went out, taking the shears with her.

She was shivering with triumphant laughter all the way to the steamship office. She bought herself a better stateroom than she had intended, because she was getting rid of Strubel's money. And she chuckled from Sandy Hook to the Needles as she reclined in her steamer chair, trying to look as if it were not her first voyage.

The angel on the front cloud may have been laughing



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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with her, or he may have been laughing because from his vantage point he could see what a maelstrom of trouble was brewing for her around the quays of Cherbourg, where Dirk Memling had promised to meet her—had *promised* to meet her.

### CHAPTER LII

#### NELLIE DISCOVERS FRANCE

**I**F I'd 'a' been slammed ashore on Robinson Caruso's island all by me lonesome, I couldn't feel lonelier than what I feel lonesome now," Nellie Gaskell was mumbling to herself for company. Crowds surrounded her, but she knew nobody. She faced the city of Cherbourg, and was afraid of it. She looked back over her left shoulder, and saw the huge steamer *Mutterland*, which had brought her across the sea, already dwindling off toward its German port, after exuding its Paris-bound passengers on board a tender.

Nellie sat on somebody's else trunk, and kicked her heels against somebody's else initials. And then a porter came up and pulled the trunk out from under her. She had to stand up, and her shoes were too tight. She had saved them to wear down the gangplank, because he was to have met her, and a gangplank is a good place to show off shoes. Item, the toes were patent leather; item, buckles of silver-near.

Her plight was pitiful. She was friendless and Frenchless in France. And her shoes were too tight. And her other shoes were in her trunk. And she didn't know where her trunk was.



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## Nellie Discovers France

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After the harrowing series of mishaps that had attended her efforts to reach Paris with Dirk Memling, it seemed hardly possible that Fate should have another knife up her sleeve. Nellie bitterly recalled her motto:

“Poik up, old goil, the woist that ever was can always get a little woisser.”

But Doik hadn't otta not met her. He knew she didn't know enough French to keep from starving at a tabble dot. Besides, he had sent her a wireless that he would be at the shore end of the gangplank, and she had hurried down the cleated way with her face all made up to greet him. Her smiles had relaxed like curtains slowly lowered.

She had run hither and yon about the dock, dodging the *facteurs* as they catapulted trunks in all directions and howled “At-taw-shaw!” whatever that meant. But never a Memling she found. The other passengers had stampeded every which way, identifying luggage, and seeing it carried into the room where the customs officers made a polite pretense of examining things.

In time the trunks and the passengers and their parcels were stowed on the funny train which was evidently panting to get back to Paris. But no Memling came for Nellie.

A number of uniformed Frenchmen poured out a vast amount of words which Nellie supposed to be French; but she drearily shook her head, and answered:

“I don't get you, Gastong.”

Nellie was so pretty that it was not hard even for a Frenchman to be polite to her, but she could not, or would not, understand.

Finally two interpreters approached her, and addressed her in English. They explained graciously that



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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she should get her trunks through the customs, and get herself on board the train. They thought they knew English, but they had not met with East Side New Yorkese. Her answer threw them into complete disorder:

"Nay, nay, Pauline! Nix on the choo-choo for mine. A soittain poisson Marconies me he'll toin up at the dock; so I'm all to the Cassie Bianca; 'the goil stood on the boinin' dock'—you know the rest."

The first interpreter walked apart with the second interpreter, and said:

"What language is it she speaks? And who is Pauline?"

The second interpreter leaned on the first interpreter, and answered:

"But yes; but who is Choo-Choo? Some words are nearly Angleesh, but they do not mean somesing togezzer, and some words mean nossing alone, so perhaps it is Indian she talks."

"But Choo-Choo is Chinois!"

They debated the mystic syllables, but all they got from them was a headache; also a vague notion that she was waiting for somebody named Bianca.

They asked her again if she were expecting perhaps somebody.

"Sure, Mike!" she brightened.

"What is it her name, please? Is it Pauline or Bianca?"

Nellie laughed Nellishly. "Her name! Pauline! I'd like you to hand that to him!"

"Ah, she is a him?"

"Her am."

"Then perhaps if you will tell us who it is he is, we



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## *Nellie Discovers France*

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could write him a little blue—a telegram, and he comes or answers. Who is it he is, and where, please?”

Nellie could not resist answering with an expression her Irish mother had used to use:

“If you knew that and had your supper, you could go to bed.”

The interpreters looked at each other and blushed, particularly the married one. She explained:

“If you could put me wise to where he is, you’d be some intoipreter.”

The unmarried interpreter desperately urged:

“You wish to go to Paris, yes?”

“Yes, but not as any monologue act. I’m one of a team. Get me?”

The married interpreter found Nellie so pretty that he was tempted to the romantic sublimity of offering to leave wife and children to beg in Cherbourg while he escorted her; and the unmarried interpreter trembled with a similar declaration; but the chief guard of the train intervened with a Now or Never, and Nellie, answering rather what his watch implied than what his French declared, said:

“Don’t let me lose your job on you, conductor. I couldn’t get you another.”

The conductor lifted his hat and signaled the engine driver to move on.

The train writhed out of the station, glided along the quay, and slid from sight like a many-jointed snake. It left the interpreters to their own desperate devices with Nellie.

Once more they asked her who it was that that gentleman was who was so blessed as to be waited for by her, and so cursed as to keep her waiting. Nellie began to



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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explain Dirk Memling's name and appearance, when an old habit of caution checked her.

An iciclic chill formed on her heart, in a sudden dread that Memling had failed her because he had been arrested on some one of the dozen charges that were always hanging over his beautiful head. Or perhaps he was hovering in the vicinity, not daring to appear. Perhaps he was even now watching her from behind some building, or trunk, or door. Perhaps he was waving vain signals to her from a lair.

To give Memling's name or describe him might bring down no end of disasters. She decided not to divulge it, at any hazard of distress for herself.

Therein must lie one of the chief inconveniences of the thief's profession. Every art has its drawbacks, of course, and this must be thievery's. The constant necessity for anonymity or pseudonymity is surely one of the major hardships of dishonesty. And, until the invisible cloak of the ring of Gyges becomes a practical reality instead of a fictional dream, thieves must put up with the most irritating complications of this sort.

But Nellie looked so little like a thief that dear old Lombroso himself would have gladly welcomed her into his household. As for the interpreters, when she turned pale at their query, and declined to name or limn her absent cavalier, they could imagine nothing wickeder than a lovers' tryst, a clandestine adventure or an elopement.

Their romantic hearts bled to see it so mismanaged. They offered the waif all the hospitality they could afford. They answered such questions of hers as they could understand, and they saw that she had refreshments. Both of them were impelled to submit themselves as substitutes for the missing eloper, and neither quite dared.



## CHAPTER LIII

## ON TO PARIS

THE distant town looked fascinatingly attractive to Nellie; it seemed to beckon her to wander the twisted streets among the crazy roofs.

But she refused to be beguiled from that platform. She was sure that the moment she left it Memling would arrive, look about, and, not finding her, disappear forever.

And so she waited hour after hour, crying a little now and then, swearing a little now and then, and simply perishing for a cigarette all the while.

Eventually the afternoon waned into evening; the gloaming deepened, and the fears that had come with twilight gathered round her. It was lonely on the dock, and even the interpreters had gone to dinner; the refreshment room and the telegraph office were closed.

And then a loping cab horse came scrambling into view, striking sparks from the sharp paving stones. Nellie knew who was in the cab before she saw the dim figure, familiar even in silhouette, standing up and waving frantically.

She ran to meet him, crying "Doik! Doik!" and nearly embraced the horse. The driver furiously hauled the poor old hack to its bony haunches, and emitted guttural protests, while Memling leaped to the ground, caught Nellie in his arms, and encouraged her to a few comfortable tears.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"I knew you'd wait for me," Memling murmured. "You always stay put, don't you?"

"Do I?" she asked, sobbing deliciously. "But what on oith detained you, Doik? Did you oversleep as per usual, or just forget, or what?"

"Oversleep! Forget! What made me late was being too early."

"Oily? Yes, for the next boat; but I came on this one."

"I'll never do it again," Memling vowed.

"Do what again?"

"Use forethought and caution, and all that sort of thing. Every time I take old Father Time by the forelock, he knees me in the stomach. Never in my life did I set out extra early to make a train that I didn't get left."

"There's sumpum in what you say, Doik," Nellie philosophized. "Trust to luck and you got a chance—not much, but some. But use your brain and it seems like you was challengin' the Fates to a duel. They feel they gotta show you what a woim you really are."

"I was so afraid that the regular boat express from Paris might be delayed, and you might have to wait here, that I took a train four hours earlier. And so, of course, I ran into a neat bit of sabotage."

"Sabo—what?"

"It's the latest French invention. You see, there's a big railroad strike on, and the strikers do all the damage they can by leaving things undone. They didn't want to upset the boat express, so they chose the train I took. Some track layers took the spikes out of a couple of rails, and just forgot to put them back. My train came along, and turned a somersault at a little village—there's a



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## On to Paris

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beautiful old church there, built in the thirteenth century."

"That thoiteen explains it," Nellie interposed. "Weren't you killed or anything?"

"I got a few bumps, that's all; and I stood on my head for twenty minutes till I was pulled out feet first, but I wasn't damaged."

"Maybe you got intoinal injuries!" Nellie gasped, with all of the laity's superstitious dread of that mystic form of damage.

"Maybe," said Memling; "but the main thing is I'm so mad I could whip the entire labor union single-handed. They got the track repaired and the wreckage cleared up just in time to let the boat express go through. I watched it shoot past at sixty-five miles an hour. Then my train got under way, and limped along, stopping at every little village, and pausing to let six expresses go by. I couldn't catch one of them. I got into the main station at Cherbourg a few minutes ago, and took a cab to the dock, hoping against hope that you would have stayed. And you did. God bless you, you did!"

"I've loined that when you say 'Meet me at a soittain spot,' that's the spot I'm supposed to meet you at."

"Weren't you worried sick?"

"Oh, no; I was simply in a Toikish bath, that's all. But the main thing is, we've met up again. Let's get a pair of handcuffs and lock ourselves together, and throw the key away, so we won't lose us any more."

"That's a good idea," said Memling, locking hands with her. "Jump in the cab."

"You're not goin' to drive to Paris in this poor old horse and buggy?"

"Lord, no! We're going to the *gare* in Cherbourg,



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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and take an express to Paris. There's one leaving in a few minutes."

"But what about the dinner question? I could take care of sumpum to eat simply elegant about now."

"We'll eat on the train."

"Do they have dining cars in this country?"

"Now, Nellie, you mustn't think that France is slow. In a thousand ways it makes New York look like the little neck of the backwoods."

"Well, o' course, the only Frenchmen I ever knew were waiters. They weren't any slower than all waiters are. And then again, I saw Sarah Boinhardt, but I couldn't get much of a line on what she said. Still, live and loin is my trade-mark."

They caught the train, and it swept them to Paris at a speed that set Nellie to gasping. She could see little of France but the lights of the cities they sped through, and she saw little of these because she slept most of the way. The sea air and the long vigil on the dock had tired her, and now she felt a drowsy luxury in the protection of Memling.

He hated to waken her, but finally he must, and he woke her with the magic words:

"Paris, Nellie! We're in Paris!"

"My Gawd—or should I say—Moan Doo?"

"They're more apt to understand the former."

She primped in haste, yawning shamelessly, and stepped from the railroad carriages as if Paris were her very own.

Memling gave the hand luggage to one of the swarming porters, and went with Nellie to the customs officer at the station, where he speedily discovered that Nellie's trunk had been shipped to Paris under a seal. With the



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## *Mussoo De Voivang*

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aid of Memling's almost perfect French, the trunk was quickly passed, and carried out to a cab.

"They got taxis here, too, haven't they?" said Nellie. "This is really quite a modern little boig."

The taxicab skated along boulevards lined with cafés, and nearly every café crowded.

"They're late upsitters, too, these Parisites," said Nellie.

As soon as the trunk was taken to her room at the hotel Memling had selected, she was all for venturing forth again.

Refreshed by her sleep on the train, and stimulated by the ozone of Paris air, she had the mood of a summer dawn. And Memling, renewing his acquaintance with the Paris of his young art-student days, felt youth throbbing again in his arteries.

He kept full stride with Nellie's zestful pace, and the sidewalk café, which was such a joyous discovery to her, was a paradise regained to him.

## CHAPTER LIV

### MUSSOO DE VOIVANG

SHE took an infantile delight in everything, every person, every trick of costume or manner. Her comments were like a child's.

"Say, Doik, the cops wear swords here, don't they? And I haven't seen an Irish-looking one yet. They soive the beer with a saucer under the glass, see? And you get a new saucer with every glass of beer, don't you?"



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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And they stack them up, don't they? You're not supposed to take 'em home with you, are you?"

The much-decorated women, drifting decoratively along the streets, interested her immensely.

"I suppose those are demimondes traipsing up and down the bullyvard."

"I suppose they are."

"Is that why you came over on another steamer from mine, so as to watch them go demimonding along?"

"Nellie! You know I thought you would be here ahead of me."

"Well, maybe you did. But you got here foist, didn't you? And you came right along on down to Paris instead of waiting for me at Choiboig, didn't you?"

All she wanted was to be a little jealous, and to be reassured. He did his best.

"I had to arrange the business of the paintings and get our trunks and things that came over on the *Morganatic* and our letter of credit that we left with the purser."

"The pictures, that's so! Why haven't you told me about them?"

"Why haven't you asked me?"

"I haven't had time, but I'm askin' you now. How about it?"

Memling looked around to note if he were in earshot or eyeshot of anybody. He could hear nothing but a jabber of French; he could see nobody who looked Anglo-Saxon. English seemed disguise enough. So he bent closer to Nellie, and told his story.

"That old crook of a Max Strubel gave me a letter of introduction to his fellow crook in Paris—Bertrand de Vervins."



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## Mussoo De Voivang

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"Slip me that again, please."

"Bertrand de Vervins."

"Oh! I get you! Boitrong de Voivang!"

"Exactly."

"Does he deal in pictures, too?"

"Yes; he's a crooked dealer who mixes up genuine and forgery till he can hardly tell where he stands himself. Well, I explained my great invention to him, and at first he was so very polite that I knew he wasn't convinced at all. That made me mad, and I said: '*Pas de cérémonies, monsieur.*'"

"Pa de Sarah who?"

"I said: 'No ceremonies, monsieur. I have invented the greatest scheme ever known for smuggling paintings into America without paying duty on them.' He shrugged his shoulders: 'So many people tell me that, and they are always being caught,' he said, 'and the pictures are taken away from them,' he said. But I told him I had a new way. I told him that I had invented a marvelous method of painting another painting over another painting so that later I could remove the other painting from the other painting without injuring the other painting."

"But what becomes of the other painting?" Nellie queried sarcastically. "Are you talking ragtime? You've got so many 'others' I don't know one other from t'other other."

"That's what *he* said. But I said: 'Look here, Monsieur de Vervins,' I said. 'You give me a valuable masterpiece of modern art, say, a canvas by Uzanne, or Dégas, or Renoir,' I said. 'It is worth, say, a hundred thousand francs.'"

"How much is that in Christian money?"



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Memling tossed her the information impatiently: "Twenty thousand dollars."

"It must be a big picture to pull down that much cash!" Nellie mused.

"Nonsense!" said Memling. "Meissonnier sold one of his pictures for fifty thousand dollars while he was alive, and Millet's 'Angelus' was sold to America for over a hundred thousand dollars fourteen years after his death, and a year later it was bought back by a Frenchman for three-quarters of a million francs. The duty on that alone would have been—let me see—at fifteen per cent"—he figured on the marble-topped table—"it would have been twenty-two thousand five hundred dollars. And when Millet was young he was so poor that he couldn't afford canvas, and he painted a new picture over an old one, just as I propose to do."

"Art is a good business when it's good," Nellie concluded.

"That's what I told that old fat cook of a Vervins. I explained to him that if he would give me a few paintings by modern masters, worth, say, a hundred thousand dollars, I could save him fifteen thousand dollars duty on them."

"Didn't that put old Voivang into a poisperation?"

"He sweat a little round the collar. But he cooled off with fright. 'But, yes,' he said, 'but how do I assure myself,' he said, 'that when you have painted over them you have not ruined them?' he said. 'It would be small profit to save the fifteen-per-cent duty and destroy the one-hundred-per-cent painting,' he said. I told him I would guarantee him against loss. He smiled very politely, and said: 'Is it that monsieur would permit that I demand what securities he has?'"



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## *Mussöo De Voivang*

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"Well, of course, he had me there; so I said I would give him a demonstration. If he could lend me a painting I would paint another over it, and then remove the other painting, leaving the——"

"Doik, if you say another 'other,' I'll soitan'y have to moider you with one of these beer saucers."

"Well, he brought out an old canvas, a beautiful, time-mellowed masterpiece. I said: 'It looks like a Rembrandt.' He said: 'It is a Rembrandt.' I hated to risk destroying an old master—the new ones don't count; they can paint more. Still, I didn't want to show him I lacked confidence in my scheme, so I swallowed hard, and said carelessly: 'And if this should be ruined—not that it would or could, but if it should, how much would it cost?' I said.

"'Ten dollars,' he said, or at least, he said, 'Fifty francs.' I gasped. 'Fifty francs for a Rembrandt!' He smiled. 'The man who paints these for me would paint me a thousand at that rate.' So I took the Rembrandt to the hotel, covered it with the layer of paint I have specially prepared, then daubed on a rough portrait."

"Who was the model?" Nellie put in hastily.

"You were."

"But I was on that Joiman steamship."

"You were present in my heart," Memling answered with a bow.

"Paris is doin' you good already," Nellie beamed. "Keep right on."

"I painted a portrait of you, and showed it to old Vervins. He said: 'You are a very poor painter, monsieur, but if you can remove what you put on, I shall do myself the honor of calling you a great artist.'"

Nellie was furious. "He's got a noive! Why didn't



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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you smack his fat face off for him?" she demanded. "Telling you you weren't a great painter. Didn't you tell him you were a great sculptor?"

"I wanted to, but I didn't have the courage. I simply asked for another room to work in. He showed me into an empty studio, and I restored the Rembrandt in a jiffy."

"But what became of the portrait of me?" Nellie anxiously demanded.

"Heaven knows! Where are the snows of yesteryear?"

"You hadda rub me off the slate?" she pouted.

"I had to. I hated it, but Vervins wanted to see his Rembrandt reappear. I knew he'd try to snoop and steal my secret, so I hung my hat over the keyhole, and worked away till every trace of my portrait of you was gone. I could have hung my hat on his eyeballs when I handed him back the canvas just as it was before. He expressed great admiration of the work, and tried to steal some of my bottles of mixture. I took them away from him politely, and then he tried to smell the sponges and brushes to see if he could not sniff the secret chemicals."

"The villain!" Nellie fumed. "Trying to steal from a—a——" She began to back pedal, but Memling smiled cynically.

"That's what I told him. 'It is unprofessional to rob the profession,' I said. Then he tried to buy the process, but I made a great mystery of it. I didn't tell him it was all printed in the textbooks on restoring, and that I had simply developed a hint. I did tell him, however, that it would do him no good to know the method, because that was only part of the campaign. I explained that the disguised paintings had to be taken to America, and edged through the customhouse; only a



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## Mussoo De Voivang

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native American could do that, and I told him that I was planning to go back home as a painter returning from foreign studios and bringing with him his canvases. After I floated through the customs, I would unpaint what I had painted, and—*voilà!*

“Finally, he gave in. He decided to risk the canvases, and he promised me two or three good ones to work on as an experiment. But I stormed at him. ‘This experiment can only be worked once,’ I said, ‘and it must be done on a large scale or not at all.’ At last I browbeat him into promising me twenty-five of his best possessions, twenty-five of the most fashionable living artists’ chefs-d’œuvre.”

“Whyn’t you take some of those old masters? They bring fancy premiums?”

“Yes, but there is no duty nowadays on foreign paintings over twenty years old. There is no encouragement to the skillful smuggler of the old masters. I’ve got to try the new. But some of them are all the rage, and their prices are sky high.”

“How much do you think the bunch is worth?”

Memling’s chest inflated a trifle as he tried to speak carelessly:

“The cash value of the twenty-five he has promised me will total about two hundred and fifty thousand dollars; fifteen-per-cent duty on that will be thirty-seven thousand five hundred dollars. And we divide the loot into three equal parts. It will net me twelve thousand five hundred dollars, for Strubel and Vervins pay the freight. Not bad, eh, Nellie, considering the fact that we get the trip to France thrown in.”

“It’s suppoib—simpluh suppoib!” she gasped. “You soitan’y are the greatest genius I ever hoid of.”



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"We'll get out of Paris and settle down in some quiet place where I can paint undisturbed."

"You needn't hurry out of Paris on my account," said Nellie. "It's distoibin', but I like it."

They looked about, and saw that the crowd had gradually dispersed, and that they were alone in the restaurant, save for the hideously fatigued waiter, and the cashier asleep at the desk.

A few people on early-morning errands moved drowsily about their tasks, but Paris, as Paris, was asleep.

"Say," said Nellie, "this place looks like Williamsboig on a Sunday night. I hope we're not keeping anybody up."

"We'd better go home."

"But I thought Paris never slept," Nellie complained.

"Oh, Paris is turning respectable. It's Berlin that is the naughty city nowadays. In Berlin people are just beginning their evenings out now."

"I wish we were in Boilin," said Nellie, "for I feel all fussed up by what you've told me."

"To-morrow is another day," Memling said, and gave the waiter a royal tip from his future earnings.

They strolled out to the curb. Memling looked for a taxicab.

"Let's take one of those open-face, low-necked hacks," said Nellie. "Maybe if we gave the driver a job, he'd buy the horse a coupla oats."

Memling assented, and they were soon rolling along the affable streets of after-midnight Paris. The city slumbered like a beautiful siren, reclining in the moonlight, and dreaming of raptures past and future.

"There's only one thing troubling me now," said Memling.



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## *In the Forest of Fontainebleau*

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"What's that, Doik? This hat I got on?"

"Of course not. That art dealer said I was a bad painter. Those art dealers always say that of truly great painters at first. What if I should paint so much better than the men whose pictures I'm to disguise, that I should feel it my duty to art not to rub out my own pictures?"

"Well, I should worry!"

### CHAPTER LV

#### IN THE FOREST OF FONTAINEBLEAU

**I**N the emerald depths of Fontainebleau Forest, Memling sat painting the portrait of an ancient oak, a veritable grand duke of a tree. Nellie was sitting on the turf, watching him.

"How soon'll it be my toin to pose?" she said.

He mumbled through a mouthful of brush handles: "Lord, I wish you didn't have to pose in that awful studio; if only you could pose out in the open air."

"You want to hand me a nice little case of pneumonia, so's you'll be free to marry somebody else, or floit with some of these French demonselles. I'm wise to your fiendish poipose, you Desprut Desmond."

"Hush!" said Memling. "You know I worship you, Nellie."

"Well, poissons that woishop other poissons have got a right to say so once in a while. You haven't said a woid for thoity minutes."

"If you'd been trying as hard as I have to see just what that tree really looks like, and to express a dry,



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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mossy bark in smeary oil paint, you wouldn't have much to say, either. That tree ought to be carved, not painted."

"I suppose it is hard woik, but it looks lazy; just sitting there dabbling a little brush in some colored goo and flicking it on a canvas."

"Cracking rocks is nothing to it. The artist has to crack rocks inside his skull, and half the time he cracks his own head."

"The woist of it is, you're woikin' as hard as if it was to be poimanent, when you're going to rub it all off as soon as you get to America. Why don't you just slap on any old thing?"

"A true artist's conscience nags the life out of him, Nellie. It would be dishonest to that noble old oak to fake his portrait. Besides, the painting must look real, or it would excite suspicion. And now, kindly shut up for half an hour, and then we'll go to lunch."

Nellie was silent for what seemed a full hour to her, though the minute hand on Memling's watch had made only ten steps. She sighed heavily under the burden of her thought:

"I was thinking——"

"Go right on thinking, but quit speaking, please."

"I was wondering what becomes of beautiful things like paintings and statues that get rubbed out or boined up or things like that. Seems like there'd ought to be some place to find 'em again."

"You'll find them where Jenny Lind's voice has gone, and the tears of Lady Jane Grey, and—— Oh, please hush your noise."

"I will, but I think it's a pity you can't presoive what you're painting."



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## *In the Forest of Fontainebleau.*

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"So do I, and it's a pity you can't let me alone long enough to paint it. Come on, we might as well eat."

She smiled contentedly. She was hungry, and she liked what they had to eat at Montigny.

"Insult me as much as you like, Doik, as long as you end up with a dinner bell. A goil will forgive a lotta hard woids as long as a man feeds her good afterward."

They found their bicycles where they had laid them—for the bicycle is still popular round Fontainebleau—and went rolling out of the forest-cool into the sun-beaten roads that led across the levels and down the steep hill to the little village of Montigny on the tiny river Loing, whose name Nellie could never pronounce nearer than a Chinesy "ler-wang."

As Memling unslung his canvas from his back, he bowed to the old artist who lived at their little hotel, a genial patriarch who was so kindly of soul that Memling felt ashamed of himself for not admiring the veteran's art as much as his heart.

Nellie had quite fallen in love with him. Old Henri la Berthe—which Nellie called "Ornery lar Boit—knew a little English, and enjoyed trying to make Nellie understand it. He even enjoyed trying to comprehend her. It was a sort of game of chess. To-day he insisted on seeing Memling's work, and it evoked his intense enthusiasm. He poured forth a French rhapsody which Memling translated to Nellie in the crevices of the conversation.

"He says it's wonderful—I've got the texture—better than Diaz, he says—no, not the Mexican—Diaz, the immortal painter—he says Diaz' trees were too velvety—too plushy. But he says I ought to get the human note in—just a picture of a tree is not popular—he suggests



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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a nymph or something—a dryad—or a Watteau shepherdess—not a bad idea—fun to do, anyway.”

Later, Memling talked it over with Nellie as they rowed a flat-bottomed boat on the flat-topped riverlet.

“I don’t want to put any of those classic things in—or any dressed-up ladies—just a peasant girl or something. Let’s go look through the village, and see if we can find a good-looking peasant girl.”

“Let’s not,” said Nellie. “I thought I was brang over here to do any posing that was to be posed. And now you’re going gunning for French pheasants.”

“But you’re not one, my dear. You haven’t the clothes, or the wooden shoes, or——”

“There’s a wooden-shoe store here, and I bet any of these goils would sell all the duds off her back for a franc and a half. But o’ course, if you’d rather sit out there and paint one of these French beauts, go on—*ally voo zong*.”

Memling seized her hand. He laughed, and blamed himself for a numskull. Of course she should pose. She should fit herself out with the costume, and lean against the tree.

She paid dearly for her jealousy as day after day went by. He posed her leaning against his noble oak, with one foot held back against it. She was knitting; her hands were knitting; her eyes were turned away in some dim reverie.

“Say, Doik, how much longer before I get a rest?”

“Oh, rest any time you say,” he snapped, flinging down the brush. “I was just trying to get that foot, and now you’ve moved it.”

“It had went to sleep, and it tingles clear up behind my ears. How’d you like to stand here on one Trilby



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## *In the Forest of Fontainebleau*

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like a stork forever, and then some? And my back—whew! I think my shoulder blades are grafted into the bark.”

As soon as she had shaken her foot awake, she resumed her pose, and he his work. But a moment later she was at him again:

“Did you say you was painting my off hoof, Doik?”

“No!” he snarled. “I said I was trying to.”

“Well, say, would you mind slipping me a cigarette? I’m just thoisting to death for a puff. It won’t hoit the expression of the foot, will it?”

He rose grimly, lighted a cigarette, and stuck it between her teeth. Then he kissed her cheek roughly, and went back to his post.

“If you speak again till I tell you to, I’ll hire another model—the prettiest one I can find.”

A little later she wailed: “Say, Doik, can I move my left hand a minute? This smoke’s going up me nose, and I’m famished to sneeze.”

“Rest!” he growled.

She strolled round behind him, and looked at the picture.

“It’s poifect, Doik! O’ course, it don’t look like me. If I met myself comin’ up the street lookin’ like that, I’d never reco’nize myself.”

“It’s not supposed to be a portrait.”

“Oh, I’m not casting any aspoisions on the painting. If I looked as handsome as that I’d expect ’em to be namin’ cigars and theaters after me.”

“You’re twice as beautiful as that.”

“Oh, Doik, you do bloit out the most gorgeous compliments now and then when you’re not thinking.” She kissed his nose.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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"Say, Doik, what's she thinking of?"

"The girl in the picture?"

"Um-hum."

"How should I know?"

"But she's got such a wonderful expression, so wistful and wondering, and I don't know what all."

"What were you thinking of?"

"A cigarette, or you, or why we're thieves instead of honest, and was it going to rain this afternoon, and how my old poiple skoirt would look if I hung a coupla paniers on it—and all sorts of things."

"Maybe that's what she's thinking of."

"No; she's got one of those expressions you read about in novels, where the great artist paints a soul's whole tragedy in one expression that haunts the beholder and tells him her life's story."

Memling sniffed. "Great artists don't try to do that sort of thing, Nellie. Novelists who know as much about art as I know about astronomy—and I can hardly tell the sun from the moon—fool novelists write that way; but great painters don't paint that way. Great painters try to put on canvas what they see and feel, and in their own dialect. I don't know what this girl is thinking about any more than the sculptor knew what the Venus of Melos was thinking about, or Leonardo knew what Mona Lisa was musing about. The main thing is to make the face and body look as if there were a soul alive in them."

Nellie went back to her attitude, and Memling assailed the canvas again. He had his days of triumph, when he cried: "I've got you now! I'm a better painter than I ever was sculptor." And he had his days when he said: "If this canvas were mine, I'd throw it into the River



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## *Mussoo Ornery*

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Loing. But it's got another man's masterpiece under this daub of mine."

Still he would not give up, and one day he decided to call it finished, and stop before he ruined it with detail. That day he showed it to La Berthe, and the old man's eyelids pursed with tears. He put his fingers to his lips, as if to extract a kiss from them, and threw the kiss to the little angel on the canvas. He poured out eulogies, which Memling condensed for Nellie:

"He says it's a masterpiece—it's so immediate—nice word, eh?—a beautiful moment fastened down like a butterfly on a pin—nice, idea, eh? He says I ought to send it to the Salon. I told him that I had no acquaintances—no pull; it would be rejected. He says it wouldn't—but of course it would."

He and the artist exchanged rapid-fire chatter that evidently sent Memling into the seventh heaven of pride. Later he said to Nellie:

"The old man's a bad painter, but he's a good judge of what other people do."

"Not knocking your own work, at all," Nellie had to say. But Memling was soaring too loftily to be brought down by any little shaft of irony.

## CHAPTER LVI

### MUSSOO ORNERY

THE next morning he was up with the sun, for artists are Parsees by profession; they must serve in the temple of light while their god is there. By the time Nellie was awake, he had three expensive paintings, by two of the



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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chief artists of France, and one Hungarian master, all blotted out under the first layer of paint.

"I'll give you a day off, Nellie. I've got to get out in the woods and find some more subjects. I can't spend as much time on these as I did on the peasant girl, or I'll never get those twenty-five canvases covered. You go for a row on the river; but first you might pack that peasant girl safely and put her away for the voyage. Be careful; she's wet yet. Good-by."

Nellie watched him trundling his wheel up the sharp hill; then she went about various tasks, pausing to gaze at the peasant girl and growing more and more fascinated by the mystery of her meditations.

A few hours later she went down to take out the boat. She found La Berthe just finishing his coffee at a table on the water's very edge.

"Why aren't you woiking, mussoo?" she said.

"Valking?" he said. "I am too *fatigué* to go valking."

"No, not walking—woiking."

"*Je ne com*—I am not under ze standing."

She gave up, and smiled. "Won't you—*voulez vous*—come for a row on the *eau*—in the—the *bateau*?" He understood her vigorous pantomime, at least.

"*Enchanté!*" he exclaimed, and she helped him in, expecting him to sit on the water any moment. But they embarked without accident, and a few stout strokes took her out of danger of the rush of water over the weir. Soon they were skimming the placid reaches of the exquisite stream, and by and by they just drifted.

"Isn't this the sweetest little immutation river that ever was?" La Berthe knitted his gray brows. "Isn't this—*celà*—the beauest petite rivare dong toot le mong?"



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## Mussoo Ornery

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O' course, in America we'd think it was only a bathtub—a sally de bang—running over, but—you don't get me? Well, you're not losing much!"

La Berthe felt that it would be easier to try to speak her language than to understand it, so he began:

"Mees Nellee, all las' night I am not sleep. I me remember Monsieur Memleeng his so sharmeeng painteeng. He did say to me: 'No, no, I cannot make expose my painteeng to the Salon. I do not know nobody not at all. I have not the'—how did he say?—'the pool.' Now me, I am not great painter like Monsieur Memleeng."

"Oh, Mussoo Ornery!" Nellie exclaimed.

"*Trêve de compliments*, Mees Nellee. I have a nice talent, but not the grand talent. I know. But I have the grand talent for to make frands and to get vat you call the pool. To-morrow morneeng I go to Paris to take my painteengs for the Salon de l'Automne—the late Salon."

"Jer comprong, mussoo," said Nellie.

"I know averybody. If I say: 'Here is painteeng by my frand, by my pupil, by my—it imports not,' they say, 'Good! Let us have the honneur to see it.' And once they see the little *paysanne* who is so *ravissante*, they will give her their hommage and a place on the best wall."

"Pertater," said Nellie dubiously.

"*Non, non, pas de peut-être, mais incontestablement, sans aucun doute, sans aucun!*"

"English, silver play!" Nellie gasped. The old man leaned close, and whispered as if he were transmitting a dark plot in a large crowd, instead of unfolding a benevolent scheme on a lonely river:

"Mees Nellee, I am one grand *conspirateur*! Me, I love to *comploter*. I have the inspiration. Monsieur



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Memleeng is afraid to send his so *belle peinture* to the Salon. You shall geeve it to me. I take it to the jury. Eef they say: 'No, we do not wish,' I bring back the peecture, and Monsieur Memleeng does not know his feeling is hurt. Eef they say: 'Yes, we accept!' then I bring back the *triomphe*!"

Nellie's eyes and mouth widened with rapture at the conspiracy. She was so proud of Memling, and so zealous for his glory, that anything in his behalf was thrice welcome.

"Oh, that's poifectly supoib!" she gasped.

"Aha, you like, yes?" beamed the old schemer.

"Like!" said Nellie. "I love it, and I could hug you for thinking of it."

"Please!" was all La Berthe could say, as he leaned forward. And Nellie, leaning forward, took his snowy head in her hands, and kissed his pink old face.

Nellie rowed back to the little hotel, got the painting from its hiding place, and relinquished it to La Berthe.

Memling came back for a hasty luncheon. If his mind had not been absent on thoughts of future paintings, he would have observed with suspicion the curious behavior of La Berthe and Nellie. They were as restless as children trying to keep from giggling in church.

La Berthe said his farewells to Memling, and explained that business took him to Paris for a few days. Memling bade him an affectionate *au revoir*, and wheeled back to the woods.

Nellie fairly effervesced with hope, and her only dread was that Memling would insist on seeing his painting. A few times he asked her for it, but she managed to shunt him to another switch of thought.



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## Mussoo Ornery

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Finally, the great day came when a telegram from Paris reached Nellie.

"Who's telegraphing you from Paris?" Memling asked anxiously.

"Oh, a soittain party I been carrying on a little floitation with."

While Memling stared at her aghast, she read the message:

Jury honors theirsself by to accepted Monsieur Memling so charming painting. Make him the compliments. I embrace your hands.

LA BERTHE.

While Nellie was reading, her face underwent so swift a suffusion of crimson delight that Memling flashed pale with jealousy. He snatched the telegram from her, and read the signature first:

"Old La Berthe, eh? He kisses your hands, eh? The old scoundrel!" Then his eyes took in the rest, but it was Greek to him. Nellie explained it in a roundabout way that drove him frantic. When at last he understood, she got herself ready to hear a shout of celebration from him; and she made ready the meek answers to his profound expressions of gratitude to her. Instead, she saw him drop into a chair, the telegram drifting to the floor like Verlaine's autumn leaf. She thought that he was about to have apoplexy over the good news. But he said:

"Nellie, you meant well, but—Jumping Jupiter, how you have put the fat in the fire!"

"How have I?" she pouted.

"Don't you realize that under my miserable daub——"

"It's not a miserable daub; it's a shay-doiver."

"Well, whatever it is, it is resting on a thirty-thousand-



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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dollar painting by the great Uzanne. And it's got to come off."

"Well, take it off." Nellie was snippy with the bankruptcy of her great expectations.

"But how can I? It's accepted now. It won't be exhibited for three or four weeks, and it's got to hang there for three months! And somebody might want to buy it for a few hundred dollars. And we're supposed to start back to America soon. Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!"

Nellie was so steeped in France by now that her own despair was voiced in the tragic wail of:

"Moan Doo! Moan Doo! Keskersay ker jay fay!"

### CHAPTER LVII

#### THE IRONY OF FAME

MEMLING was in despair over the success of his painting, since to recall it would rouse suspicion and inquiry. Memling could not afford to set the faintest match of suspicion to the fuse of inquiry. Besides, he had a gnawing curiosity to know what the critics would say of his work.

He did not dare, however, to tell the owner of the under-picture what had happened to it. But De Vervins found it out. As soon as the Salon was opened the critics fell foul of Memling's painting. It was original in handling, completely personal, full of observations that critics had not learned to make for themselves; so they hammered it hard.

Nellie was for moidering the critics one after another, but Memling rhapsodized: "It reminds me of the way they lambasted all the great innovators, Millet and Manet



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## *The Irony of Fame*

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and Monet—we M's seem to get it, don't we? Just so the critics ridiculed painters who painted horses as they really ran instead of the way painters had painted them? Then along came the instantaneous photograph and showed the truth. And now the critics won't endure a man who lacks the camera eye. It was the same way with Monet's full sunlight. The critics could not make head or tail of his fierce ambition to set his canvases ablaze with noon. And now that they are used to him, they can't tolerate old-fashioned light and shade. It's the same way with me. You remember how I struggled to see what I really saw, and then to nail it to the canvas without previous prejudices. The critics can't understand it. They don't remember how sunlight really would look in such a place. So they give me the broad-axe. But it only proves I'm a real painter, a seer, a faithful reporter. Nellie, I'll have to plead guilty to being a great genius."

Nellie was used to these moods. She merely answered:

"Help yourself to the molasses, Doik!"

The bludgeons of the critics gave Memling a sort of perverse encouragement. But they also brought down on his head the wrath of the owner of the canvas. De Vervins read the criticisms. Memling's name caught his eye. With him to think was to suspect.

He hurried to the Salon, found Memling's exhibit and stood pondering it. The peasant leaning against the tree did not interest him. But the size of the canvas did. It reminded him of the dimensions of his Uzanne.

He hoped that it was not his beloved Uzanne, which he had relectantly entrusted to Memling. But the size of it! While he was stewing over the problem, Uzanne himself strolled up and, with unwitting generosity, praised



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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this new man, Memling, to the skies, advised De Vervins to buy the painting and make a fashion of Memling as he had of so many other path-finders in art.

Something about the sarcasm of this situation convinced De Vervins. He sent Memling a telegram to come to Paris at once, and when Memling reached there, asked him politely if by any chance his painting could be one of the overlays. Memling confessed that it was. With confirmed trepidation, De Vervins asked if the hidden work might be a Uzanne. Memling confessed that his painting was indeed superimposed on a Uzanne, and De Vervins proceeded to have hysterics.

Memling never mentioned Nellie's part in the affair, but took the blame on himself. Realizing the weakness of apologies in such a case, he fought fire with fire, and defied the lightning. Now, De Vervins grew pathetic.

"What am I to do?" he whined. "The painting cost me thousands of francs; it should bring me in America better than a hundred thousand francs; and now it must perish under your miserable, imbecile, detestable daub. Worse yet, I hear that the French government wishes to buy your painting for the Luxembourg gallery, and will offer you a thousand francs for it."

Memling almost expired at the compliment.

"The French government?—the Luxembourg?—immortality!—Oh, sell it to them by all means!"

De Vervins squealed like a pig under a gate:

"And my hundred thousand francs! Who pays me those? And Uzanne! Who explains to him what has become of his painting when he asks? He goes to America himself next year. He expects this painting to be a missionary. He will wish to see it. Shall I tell him it is hanging in the Luxembourg under that atrocious crust



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## *The Parish Policeman Makes an Arrest*

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of yours? Uzanne is a fighter; when he is angry he demands a duel. Will you fight him?"

"No," said Memling, "I could not kill a man who has taste enough to praise my work. But, of course, I really ought not to disappoint the French government. If it wishes my painting, it ought to have it."

"Name of a name of a name!" De Vervins broke out with frightful profanity.

But Memling only smiled:

"Don't worry. It will all turn out for the best."

And he left De Vervins clutching his skull as if he were trying to unscrew it from his spine.

## CHAPTER LVIII

### THE PARISH POLICEMAN MAKES AN ARREST

MEMLING chuckled all the way back to Montigny, and a nervous pottery-maker in the compartment with him was convinced that he was a lunatic. Memling told it all to Nellie and revelled in the misery of De Vervins. He had a misery of his own, for the temptation to get into the Luxembourg was almost more than he could resist.

Nevertheless, he took pains that his other canvases should not be such as to tempt Nellie or La Berthe to exhibit them. He painted studies of casts, unfinished landscapes, still life, fruits and silver, copper utensils from the kitchen of the hotel, and life studies from Nellie.

When he tired of work, he and Nellie walked far and wide. It was a joy to be in a world where all was inno-



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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cence and beauty, where temptation was asleep, and remorse forgotten, and where the police were not to be feared.

The police were—or the policeman was—an unending joke to Nellie. His cocked hat and his sword amused her deliciously. She called him “the village constabill.”

But one day she did not smile at him. She and Memling were returning from a long stroll in the forest. It had awed them like a huge cathedral, humbled and exalted them at once.

Coming back along the village street they stepped aside to let the policeman pass, but less for his own glory than for the sake of what followed him. He headed a little wedding procession, a village dignitary or two in evening dress, a young soldier or two in uniform, the bride in veil and flowers, her mother, the bridegroom’s mother and a few relatives.

The procession moved solemnly along toward the little church, trying not to show how foolishly happy it felt.

Memling smiled: “It takes a policeman to get them to the altar here.”

Nellie did not smile. She spoke in a strange deep tone: “Don’t joke about marriage, Doik. If there’s any laugh comin’, that cute little bride’s got it on me.”

Memling stared at her with a bewildered query. She turned away her eyes—guilty with sudden tears. He felt something stir in a dusty corner of his heart—the attic of his heart where he had stored dusty ideals of honor and respectability and duty and other old-fashioned furniture.

“I’ve been a brute and a scoundrel to you, Nellie,” he murmured. “But if you’ll take me, I’ll make you my wife this minute.”

“Oh, no, thank you!” Nellie laughed, but there was



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## *The Sun-burnt Nymph*

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a snap in her laughter and she hurried away to the inn. Memling started after her, then let her go and set off in the opposite direction.

Before he returned he had fathomed the mysteries of French marriage laws; he had learned that an American can be wed only after a deal of red tape is unrolled, but he started the spool to rolling.

By the time the formalities were completed, he had persuaded Nellie that he wanted her for his wife because he loved her and not because he owed her the rite. He had to woo her and win her and she was not an easy conquest.

But when she yielded and they were legally linked in holy matrimony she was as shyly, sweetly foolish as any peasant bride in France, and Dirk himself was feeling as solemn as a *curé*.

It only remained now to finish a canvas or two and return to America.

## CHAPTER LIX

### THE SUN-BURNT NYMPH

**I**N her new guise of wife, Memling found a new beauty in Nellie, a new look in her eyes. He determined to portray her beauty on his last canvas. He tried her in various poses.

One of these was a nymph, a snowy white nymph deploying her length along the bank of a stream. The river Loing posed for the stream out of doors, but Nellie posed for the nymph in the studio that Memling had sublet, and an old tapestry represented the mossy bank.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Nellie was restless, as usual, but this time it was because she was suffering from the effects of unwonted exercise in the sun. She had rowed a boat on the river Loing, and drifted about on its glowing surface with sleeves rolled high and throat open. In consequence, her tender skin was baked a painful brown. This moved her to say:

"Those fresh air nymphs you always see lolling round these paintings have always got skins like the after-taking ads of a beauty parlor. But if those dames really stayed out in the sun and rain all summer, they'd have skins like a punkin pie. Here I been rowing around that toy river a few days and my arms and neck are so sunboined I look as if I had Indian blood breakin' out on me in spots. If a nymph lived outdoors all her life, she'd be cooked to a toin. And she'd have big feet and hands, and her hair full of burrs, for what would she comb it with? I wonder some of these artists don't get wise and do a real nymph!"

"That's a great idea, Nellie, you shall be a real nymph, and the tint of your neck and forearms shall be your general color scheme."

"All right, Doik, and it'll be as good as a soimon to some of these near-artists."

Her enthusiasm flickered before Memling's next idea:

"Another thing, Nellie, it's hopeless to get real open air effects in a stuffy studio like this. We'll find some hidden nook in the Forest, and you can pose there."

"Not while I got my health and strength enough to resist," Nellie averred. "Ump-umm! Doik—a coupla ump-umms!"

Memling pleaded: "But it's all for the sake of art and truth and reality, and——"



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## *The Sun-burnt Nymph*

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"Those things never got me anything. And all they'd get me outdoors would be being arrested by a French John Darm."

"There wouldn't be the slightest danger of that."

"Suppose somebody comes along."

"The Forest is practically deserted in the morning, and we'll find a secluded spot, and to make assurance doubly sure, we'll take along a scout to warn us."

"Just as much obliged, but no, thank you!"

"All right," Memling sulked, "if you don't want to help me. I feel that I could do something great, something epoch-making."

"In that case o' course," she quoted as she surrendered, "in the woids of Joshua Whitcomb Riley: 'I got nothin' at all to say, my daughter, nothin' at all to say.'"

It was a bright morning in August, and three solitary horsemen on bicycles might have been seen threading the loneliest, grassiest roads of the great thicket of Fontainebleau. One of the horsemen was a woman. They sought one of those characteristic Fontainebleau spots, a sort of reversed oasis, a patch of desert in the green woods, where outcropping boulders seemed to be flung and heaped like a giant child's neglected playthings. It was a kind of cave turned inside out and drenched with sunlight.

There was only one path of approach, and Memling stationed the scout there at a safe distance, where he could be seen and heard without seeing. He was instructed to keep his distance unless he had news of an invader. His promised wage was large enough to act as an antiseptic to any curiosity he might have had.

While Nellie was timorously making ready, Memling was setting up his easel. The canvas was especially large. Before Memling had received it on trust, it had revealed



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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a scene in a café by Théophile Tonty. Memling hated the canvas; he hated all of Tonty's work. It was to him an anarchy of drawing and a chaos of color, an affectation of eccentricity in place of individuality. But Tonty had the public at his feet, and his mannerisms and pretenses were hailed as genuine. And the value of this canvas was fifteen thousand dollars.

Memling had not intended to spend much time on the concealment of this picture, but Nellie had kindled a desire to paint a realistic nymph in a real glare of sun.

He soon had Nellie instructed in the pose he had decided upon, a graceful reclining attitude among great boulders, with the face full of vague animal wonder.

The pose was one of infinite grace; part of her beautiful figure was heavily shadowed by the overarching rocks; part of it was gilded with glowing sunlight. There was a minimum of drapery.

Nellie found her resting place on the rocks anything but pleasant to her soft body. And terror of discovery was added to discomfort of flesh. It was for that reason she grew petulant with Memling:

"Leave me here a while longer and I'll be the color of my nose all over."

"Be quiet a little longer, and you'll be the living original of a masterpiece."

"If I live. If anybody was to come this way, Heaven preserve me, that's all," Nellie fretted, twisting this way and that to keep watch.

"Oh, don't worry," Memling answered carelessly.

"You don't have to worry," said Nellie, "but look at me; that is, you *needn't* look at me; but just *look* at me."

"You are looking your very best."

"This is no time for idle comp'ments, Doik. What I



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## *The Sun-burnt Nymph*

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want to know is what happens to me if anybody comes along?"

"Nobody's coming along, in the first place, and in the second, if anybody does come along, we have the scout on the watch to warn us."

"But when the scout comes along to warn us, what about the scout?"

"Oh, I'll manage somehow. Don't fret!"

"Oh, I'll manage somehow. Don't fret!" Nellie repeated, like a sullen echo. "The woist of it is, I oined my punishment by talking too much."

"That's true, Nellie, and I give you credit for suggesting a wonderful idea. I'm trying to carry it out now, and it will give immortal fame to both of us."

"Immortal for about fifteen minutes!" Nellie sniffed, "and fame that nobody will know of but ourselves! What's the use of that confidential fame?"

Memling sighed so deeply that Nellie regretted her temper. She was usually battling fiercely to ward off from him any discouragement, but now she was heaping it upon him.

"Forgive me for that outboist, Doik," she pleaded tenderly. "It's not you I'm abusing; it's the things that weight you down like a coisse. I want you to be what you desoive to be, the famousest artist in the woild; and here you are squanderin' your genius on paintings that have to be rubbed off as soon as you get to America. Everything you do seems to put you deeper in the mire. You got a brain that's a poifect wonder, but you're exoitin' it only to cover yourself up deeper and darker and drag you foither and foither down. It's like a man diggin' his own grave. He may be a fine ditch digger, and he may trim it off as neat as can be, but, after all,



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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he's digging his own grave. And the better he does it, the woisser it is."

Memling put down his paint brushes and palette solemnly, and took his knee into his hands. Ordinarily, he was petulant when Nellie interrupted the silence of his work with her chatter. But what she said now hurt him beyond peevishness.

"You're right, Nellie. We must get out of this rut. We're on the wrong road. If we can only carry this scheme through, we'll turn honest and upright. And we'll have money enough to afford it."

"That's what you always say, Doik. And it never works out. Either we don't get the cash we thought we would, or we spend it on a sploige, or lose it somehow. Thieves' money seems to have more wings than honest money."

"I'm not so sure," said Memling. "My money flew away just the same when I earned it honestly. The main difference is that our office hours have to be so irregular. And then, modern business seems to depend so heavily on advertising, and thieves don't dare advertise."

"Don't you believe it! I've read plenty of thieves' *advoitisements*," Nellie insisted.

"Oh, mining stocks, and patent medicines and games of that sort. But even those are having their field narrowed more and more. Some day we might try how much we could steal in a big advertising campaign."

He had relieved his gloom by his favorite method of talking it away, and now he picked up his brush and palette once more.

"Meanwhile, let's clean up the harvest we've sown here. The job is almost finished. We ought to have sailed for America last week. Max Strubel is getting



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## *Ignominious Flight*

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anxious, and De Vervins is growing so polite I'm sure he'll insult me in a few days."

A shrill whistle broke up the quarrel. The scout had scented a wanderer. Nellie was frozen for a moment into such a statue as Diana must have made when she saw that Actæon saw her in swimming. The scout came rushing up with his warning, bringing it in person.

### CHAPTER LX

#### IGNOMINIOUS FLIGHT

NELLIE was angry enough to have turned the rash youth into a stag for his hounds to tear to pieces; but in the first place, she lacked the goddess-like power, if not the goddess-like beauty; and in the second, there were no hounds to tear him to pieces.

She rolled awkwardly off her rock, and crawled on all fours into a sort of cave, calling to Memling:

"Hoil a rock at that infoinal cub!"

The youth came crashing through the shrubbery, gasping:

"*Attention, m'sieu'; prenez garde, m'sieu'!*"

"*Prenez garde yourself,*" shouted Memling. "Get out! *Eloignez-vous, décampez, scootez-vous to the diable!*"

Memling could only stop his advance by running to meet him half way. He seized him and shook him and how-dare-you'd him. He shook out of him the information that strangers were wandering that way. Memling peered from the rock and saw, indeed, a family sauntering merrily forward. To his horror, he saw that they carried lunch-baskets.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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He ran to tell Nellie, who gave him one look. It had all the reproach and profanity and wrath in the world. If that look could have been spelled, it would have to be printed with a dash.

Memling shriveled before it, then ran, gathered her things together, shoved them into the lair where she had retreated and, clutching up easel and canvas, fled himself with much scattering of brushes.

Straight to the open-air studio climbed the family, a family of small shopkeepers out for a day of fresh air. They sat down where the easel had been and spread out a cloth for luncheon. The children showed a desire to explore, and were just making their way to Nellie's hiding place when the mother announced that the feast was ready.

Nellie grew desperate with delay. The cranny into which she had glided was so small that she could not sit up straight in it. But she grimly set to work to get back into her things and make ready for escape. The frequent collisions of her skull with the low roof did not improve her temper.

Just about the time the family finished lunch and the good man of the family spread a handkerchief over his face and prepared for a nap, Nellie was ready to crawl out. The children discovered her and stared in terror. She put her finger to her lips and hypnotized them for the time being into silence.

Memling stole from his adjoining cavern and followed, lugging his big canvas, the stool, brushes and color-box. He began to apologize, but Nellie slashed him with a look like a broadsword. They went back to the hotel in silence.

It was not till after luncheon that she showed a sign



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## *The Miracle*

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of ever speaking to him again. Then she suddenly exploded into laughter:

"It's a good thing I loined to dress in a lower boith on a sleepin' car!"

Memling began to laugh with relief. She turned on him:

"How dare you laugh! How dare you!"

He sobered instantly. She frowned a while. Then she began anew to giggle, to cacchinate, to shriek, and this ended in a good cry.

Memling was so afraid of her that he would not venture to ask her to resume the sittings. He just sat about, looking mournful and casting sad glances toward the neglected canvas.

At last, on the second day, Nellie said:

"Say, Doik, when you going to begin woik on the nymph again?"

"The minute you say the word," he gasped.

"All right. Come along."

## CHAPTER LXI

### THE MIRACLE

SO they returned to the unwalled studio. Only this time Memling stole a number of signs from various parts of the forest, signs forbidding people to pass, "path closed" signs, and even one that warned the wayfarers against explosives.

He set these up round about the retreat, and they were not interrupted again.

As Memling worked, he fell into his stride anew, and



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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fell more and more in love with his subject. He was given insight into the dazzling reality of the sun-flow, the deep riches of the shadows; given power to transfer them to canvas, and courage to refuse to see with academic eyes.

For days he toiled while Nellie labored almost equally hard to keep immobile, and yet to look alive; for the model must collaborate with the artist, or the work will lack soul.

Memling's life-long training and feeling for sculpture inspired him to endow the body of the nymph with melody of line, and the roundness, the solidity of reality. His new passion for light and color fired him to constant discoveries, novel mixtures of tint and truths of value. He was unhampered and unafraid.

He spent days at it for every hour he had meant to spend. And when it was done he looked on his work with shameless pride. As a piece of craftsmanship, the canvas was already a classic; as a document in mythology, it was as epoch-making as Millet's peasants. Millet painted the poor as they really looked. Memling established the nymph as she must have been if she had ever been, blistered with sun and wind and rain, unclothed, unkempt and savage, yet strangely, wildly beautiful.

"It's a miracle, Nellie! I've got it! It's great, that's all, it's great!"

"He admits it himself," said Nellie. Then she went to the canvas, stared at it and adored it. It had not only technical bravura that the artist would admire, but the winsome charm that appeals to the common people.

Nellie gazed, and a tear rolled out of each eye. Memling stared at her:

"Why the tears? Is it so disappointing?"



"It's so beautiful it makes me want to cry. And then when I think that you're going to wash it all off, I get so choined up I want to scream. Oh, you can't destroy that, Doik!"

Memling's eyes filmed with dark revolt as he muttered:

"But underneath it is a Tonty worth fifteen thousand dollars."

"Your nymph is woith a dozen Tonties. Couldn't we poichase the Tonty and just leave it lay?"

"How much can you contribute toward the price?"

"About thoity cents."

"I'm afraid the nymph will have to go."

"Sumpum tells me you'll never destroy her, Doik."

His brows writhed and his teeth set hard as he murmured:

"The same something tells me the same thing."

## CHAPTER LXII

JAMES G. TICE, L. C. B. B. M.

THIS time Memling and Nellie made the same steamer. They were not entirely glad to be bound homeward. Artists acquire a secondary patriotism, and it is usually to France. Memling and Nellie had the normal amount of Fourth of July in their blood, but America meant danger to them. It meant that they walked among snares.

Memling's past crimes had gone undetected, but he was sure that they were not forgotten by their victims. Detectives were doubtless still looking alive to some of them, and every corner that was turned, every ring of



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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a doorbell might mean the arrival of some vengeance in uniform.

Furthermore, Memling, who was such a believer in personality in art, could not but realize that crime has also its personality. Every law-breaker leaves his autograph somewhere, and the multiplication of crimes is the subtraction of alternatives. Gradually the possibilities narrow down, and cancellation brings the detectives closer to the one mind that could have carried out all these similar schemes.

So Memling grew haggard at the thought of landing in America. For all he knew, half a dozen detectives would be waiting to battle for him. It is times like these that try the criminal's soul and tempt him to be disloyal to his profession.

Memling did not dread the ordeal of passing through the customhouse with his paintings. That would be a jovial adventure. He could pose as an artist, for he was an artist. His pictures must be accepted as the work of an artist, for he was deeply satisfied that they were the highest of art. But during his absence in France, what might have been brewing he could not know.

The ever-hovering fear of a thief is that some confederate may turn stool-pigeon to buy mercy from the police for other crimes. Some of Memling's fellows would some day surely do the same; perhaps Gold-tooth Leshner had already betrayed him. But that was for the future. Thinking could not find it out. The future alone could unveil itself.

Meanwhile, the sea-air was glorious; the voyage was smooth and the deck slid across the ocean like a huge flat car. At table they were seated with half a dozen assorted Americans. Some of these were of the pushing



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*James G. Tice, L. C. B. B. M.*

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sort; one of them particularly, an aggressive bigot who made patriotism odious.

He informed everybody that his name was Tice.

"James G. Tice of Sent Paul, Minn. I'm not one of your measly double L Ds or Ph. Ds, but I wear the title of L. C. B. B. M."

You were expected to ask what all that might mean, whereupon he would wag his head and answer with a sly smile:

"That's a title that fools 'em all. L. C. B. B. M.! I've had college professors with the headache over that. It means Largest Canner of Baked Beans in Minnesota. See? L. C. B. B. M.—Largest Canner of Baked Beans in Minnesota. That's me. Fact is, I pack more baked beans than any other two in the whole State put together. But that makes the title a little too long. Pretty good, eh? When I meet any of these long-horned college men with their A. M.s and P. M.s and M. D.s and D. D.s, I spring that on 'em. Never found anybody who could guess it yet."

At the first meal aboard, Mr. Tice had introduced himself to the first comer at the table; also he introduced himself to the second comer; then he introduced the other two to each other. He nominated himself chairman and elected himself unanimously.

Memling and Nellie had expected to meet no one. They had tried to get a table for two, but arrived at the chief steward's altar too late. Mr. Tice introduced himself to them, and then had the effrontery to introduce them to the others. The others looked sheepish, but once the job was done everybody assumed to know everybody.

Tice winked at the others and tossed Memling his card.



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Memling glanced at it and thanked him. Tice waited a moment, then asked:

"Did you get on to the title?"

Memling glanced at the card again, and said:

"Ah, yes," and resumed his conversation with Nellie.

Tice fidgeted, and when he could endure the indifference no longer, insinuated:

"Ever know anybody with that title before?"

"No," said Memling, and returned to Nellie.

"I bet you can't guess what the title means," Tice urged, growing frantic.

"I bet I couldn't either," said Memling.

Tice was a trifle beady about the brow. He would not have his life-joke ignored. So he nudged Memling, asked himself the question and answered it.

"Very ingenious," Memling tossed over his shoulder. Tice would not be dismissed:

"It's true, too. Have you ever been to Minnesota? No? Never seen Sent Paul? The idea? And you coming back from Europe! I tell you a man's got no right to go traipsing over foreign countries till he's seen his own."

"No?" said Memling.

"I'm one of those See America First fellows. Europe's got the ruins, but we've got the men. There's people that go punting on the Thames every year that don't know whether the Mississippi is a river or a lake."

"Which is it?" said Memling with malicious ignorance.

"The Thames!" said Tice, fairly expectorating the "T." "The Thames! Why, you could pour ten Thameses in the Mississippi and not raise a ripple. And you could lose the Rhine and the Rhone and the Rhene and the



Rhune and never find 'em. The Mississippi starts, you know, just a little above our city. Yes, you might say the river gets its first real start at Sent Paul. Ever seen Sent Anthony's Falls? No? They belong to Minneapolis, of course, but they're very pretty in spite of that! You've never seen Sent Anthony's Falls? It's a shame!"

"I've seen many of his temptations," Memling said, "but I always understood that he didn't have any falls."

"Don't you believe it," said Mr. Tice. "They run the biggest flour mills in the world."

"He must have been a saint when his very lapses do such noble work," said Memling.

Mr. Tice had just returned from his first hasty view of the old world and he did not like it.

"Europe is the biggest con game in the world," he proclaimed. "Nothing but a sideshow. Everybody's out for the American dollar. Everybody's got his hand out for tips."

"Don't they give tips in Saint Paul?" said Memling.

"Well, of course, they do! Do you think we're in the backwoods? We've got some of the finest hotels in the world there in Sent Paul. Of course we tip. What do you think we are?"

But inconsistencies never annoy so energetic and forthright a soul as Tice's. Memling did not attempt to point out any of the large industrial achievements, the mechanical and commercial and scientific accomplishments of Europe. He was afraid to answer any of Tice's arguments for fear he would bring down more of them.

Another member of the round table, however, was a Mr. Brundage, who was the exact opposite and opponent of Tice. Mr. Brundage had lived abroad for a few years, zealously endeavoring to conceal or atone for his American



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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birth. He was as unfair to America as Tice to Europe. They wrangled all the way across the ocean. They were equally fallacious and emphatic in defense and assault. Memling wanted to knock their heads together.

Nellie acquired a special hatred for Tice. She said to Memling one day, as they sat tucked up in their deck chairs:

"That Tice hasn't got brains enough in his head to make a koinel for a peanut. I'm goin' to advise him to take his own bean and bake it—and can it."

"Let him alone," said Memling, "or he'll ask you if you know what his title means."

"He's been trying for days to woim out of you what your business is. Whyn't you tell him you're the smallest eater of baked beans in the univoise?"

"Shh!" said Memling, "speak of the devil and you sniff sulphur."

### CHAPTER LXIII

#### THE TENACIOUS CUSTOMER

**A** LONG came Tice, who was doing the deck trot as if he were ploughing a furrow. Seeing Memling and Nellie, he stopped at their feet, and, without invitation, sat down on the end of Memling's steamer chair. Memling would gladly have kicked him over the rail, but his feet were bundled up in the blanket.

Tice was evidently laboring under an anxiety. It came out soon. He could no longer tolerate his ignorance of Memling's business. He began with conspicuous carelessness:



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## *The Tenacious Customer*

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"Does your business take you to Europe often, Mr. Memling?"

"Not often," said Memling.

"Been away long?"

"Not very."

"Glad to get back?"

"Not especially."

"What do you think of the outlook for fall trade?"

"Not much."

"Beans have been rather hard and slow, too. Any signs of a pick-up in your line?"

"None to speak of."

"Let me see, I didn't just get what your business was."

"Didn't you?" There was a silence of acute discomfort. Tice had maneuvered Memling into a corner. He could not get out without violent discourtesy. Memling writhed at the invasion of his sacred right to have a business of his own and mind it, but it was hard for him to be brutally rude, so he sighed,

"I am a painter."

"A painter! Is that so? No wonder you couldn't guess what my title meant. Well, it must be a very nice kind of a business. I don't know much about art, but I know what I like. I started to go through the Louvre there in Paris, but gee whiz, it's a regular Marathon, ain't it? After I'd walked about ten blocks, I was blind and stiff-necked and spavined, and hollerin' for a guide to lead me to the nearest door. Some very nice work there, though—yep, some right classy stuff. Sorry I missed the Monna Lizzie. Somebody stole her before I got there. I must say, I don't hanker much after the old masters. The paint looks so tired. We got some



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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fine frescoes and things out in our State Capitol. Ever see it? But you said you'd never been to Sent Paul."

"Yes. No!"

"Just what is your line?"

"I haven't any."

"I mean, do you go in for landscapes or portraits, or just fancy pictures?"

"Just fancy pictures, I imagine."

"Ever do any advertising work?"

"Not yet."

"There's the field for an up-to-date artist. Some of those fellows get big immense prices for clothing ads and breakfast food pictures. High as a couple of hundred dollars."

Nellie broke in wrathfully: "Mr. Memling wouldn't look at anything less than a coupla thousand, would you, Doik?"

"Well, I might look at it."

Tice was overwhelmed: "You must turn out some mighty smooth stuff." He took off his hat and mopped the inner band.

"He's got a picture hanging in the Salong de l'Otong now," said Nellie.

"You don't say so! He must be some painter!"

"The French gov'ment is trying to buy it off him now for the Looksongboig gallery."

"You don't tell me!" said Tice, "I wish I could see some of it. Got any samples with you?"

"You've got one picture in your stateroom, haven't you, Doik?"

"The nymph—oh, yes, but Mr. Tice wouldn't be interested in her."



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## *The Tenacious Customer*

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"Wouldn't I, though? I'd give a lot to see it. Maybe—well, I wish I could get a peek at it. I like nymphs."

"Maybe—some day," said Memling wearily. Tice lingered uncomfortably, then rose and stumbled on. His backward bow was marked by a new homage. When he was out of hearing, Nellie began to bubble with a new idea.

"I tell you what, Doik. That bean-moichant's gotta lotta dough. Like as not, if we woiked him, you could get a job painting his portrait."

"A portrait of a baked bean?"

"What's the diff, so long as he comes across with the price. Show him the sun-boint nymph and that'll clinch it."

"He'll fall dead at the sight of a nude."

"You can't tell. You'll have to go pretty far west before you find a man that's impoivious to that kind of art. Go on, let me show it to him."

"Anything you say," yawned Memling, "I'm too sleepy to care."

Memling had packed the other paintings in cases consigned to the hold, but the Sun-burnt Nymph he was afraid to trust below hatches. He wanted this picture where he could gloat over it. He kept it in his cabin.

And there one morning Mr. Tice visited him for a sight of the masterpiece. Memling explained the idea. Mr. Tice breathed rather hard when the canvas flashed upon him, but it was a pleasurable excitement.

"It's great," he said after a long stare. "It's sure nifty; it's the goods. It would be grand in a lithograph or one of those three-color halftones. I been looking for a genuine work of classy art that would do for a kind of a trade-mark. You remember how those soap people used that 'Bubbles' picture? If I had something like



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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that, I could give away a large size copy of it without printing on it for so many coupons. It's a nood, but it's decent, and those rocks take the place of clothes. I guess the women would stand for it. I've noticed you can't shock the women. I could use a small plate of it on the cans, too. And I could use it in the ads something like this: 'I wish I had a can of Tice's non-borated beans,'—or—'In the primeval times they lived on roots and raw fish, nowadays we have Tice's enticing beans'—our copy man could think up just the thing."

Memling stared at him with eyes full of wrath at the sacrilege. He was a priest listening to blasphemy. He wanted to hurl Tice from the stateroom, but, as usual, when his wrath flamed fiercest, his language was most cool:

"My dear Mr. Tice," he murmured, "you haven't got money enough to buy this work for any such purpose."

He could not have touched Tice's pride on a quicker nerve.

"Not money enough?" Tice roared. "I guess you don't realize how many cans of beans I sell in a year. I got money enough to buy the Statue of Liberty and put a can of beans in place of her torch."

"Well, go get her if she's on the market," said Memling. "This painting isn't." And he put it away as if the very look of Tice profaned it.

The men separated, Tice full of rage at defeat, and Memling fuming at his impudence. Nellie was more furious still. But it was like Memling to retreat from any position in which anybody agreed with him fervidly.

The more Nellie raged at Tice's presumption, the more Memling began to believe that there might be something to say in his favor.



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## *The Tenacious Customer*

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"Of course, in a way," he pondered aloud, "if an artist or an author has done good work, the more widely it is published, the better. If the painting were hung in a private gallery, a dozen people might see it in six months. If it were hung in the Metropolitan Art Museum, a few hundred would glance at it every day. If it were used for an advertisement, millions would see it again and again. Copies of it would be framed and hung up in thousands of homes. It would be doing a great work for the cause of art. It would be educating——"

"Good night, noise," said Nellie. "When you begin that education stuff, it's all over but the last act. Good-by, Miss Nymph."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that you've decided to sell my bath room portrait to that bean moichant."

Memling sighed: "It's an artist's fate to sell his children, Nellie. Writers may have shelves full of their own works without diminishing their prosperity, but the poor painter must send his dream-waifs out into the world."

"Don't pull out that sob-stop, Doik. You'll have me boo-hoo' in a minute. Speak up like a man and say, 'Nellie, we've got a chance to sell sumpum that belongs to somebody else, so I don't see how we can refuse.'"

Memling grinned sheepishly: "All right, Nellie, consider it said. But how much are we going to get for it? Since we're selling stolen goods, we deserve a high price."

"Well, I hate to copy your methods, but I really believe we're doing a noble bit this time. Anything that hoits Strubel is a voituous deed, and it's soitainly good woik to take money away from anybody who's got as little right to it as that bean-butcher."



CHAPTER LXIV

A CONFIDENTIAL AUCTIONEER

WITH this campaign agreed upon, they did not, of course, approach Tice with a request to reopen his offer. They pretended to have forgotten the incident altogether. And, of course, as resolute a cannery-king as Tice declined to accept the first rebuff. The next day he was perched on Memling's steamer chair again, saying:

"Mr. Memling, I'm a man of few words. I'll take that painting off your hands for five hundred dollars."

"Mr. Tice," Memling echoed, "I'm a man of fewer words. You will not."

Tice thought a while and ventured:

"Six hundred, then."

"Six hundred, never."

Several waves had flopped against the ship's side before Tice came in with a tidal wave:

"What would you say to a thousand?"

"Nothing at all."

"Good Lord, I could get five first-class illustrations for that."

"Why don't you? I'm sure this nymph wouldn't be of the slightest use to you."

"I guess I'm the best judge of the bean-booming business."

"Perhaps. But if you don't mind I'll take a little nap. This sea-air, you know."

The hand he put up to mask his outrageous yawn



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## *A Confidential Auctioneer*

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fell at his side, his eyelids drooped and his breathing was slow and shallow.

Tice turned to Nellie: "Can't you use your influence?"

Nellie said: "Shh! Let the poor fella sleep. I'll take a toin round the deck with you." And she tiptoed away with Tice at heel. Memling, lifting one eyelid to glance after them, smiled and said to himself, "He's putty in Nellie's hands," and felt so sure of her that he really fell asleep.

"The trouble with these artists," Nellie began, "is that they don't know the value of money. He told me he wouldn't take ten thou. for that."

"Ten thousand dollars!" howled Tice as they breasted the gale on the forward turn.

"It isn't worth it to you, I know," said Nellie, purposely keeping out of step with him so that his incessant efforts to get back into step with her might jiggle his brain. "Artists are always picking the wrong work for their best. Now, I don't think the Nymph is a patch on the Peasant Gail."

Tice brightened up: "The Peasant Girl! Now, maybe she'd go better with beans. Maybe I'd better buy the Peasant Girl."

"Oh, but she's hanging in the Salong. See, here she is in the catalog. I happened to be looking it over this forenoon."

Tice looked and saw her duly registered at the hotel of canvases. He grew zealous for her.

"Now, I might pay a higher price with the Salong tag on her. It would be a better advertisement. I guess I'll take her."

"Unfortunately," said Nellie, "the French gov'ment



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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has beat you to her. The President of France has offered fifteen thousand dollars for her."

"You don't tell me!"

"He wants to hang it in the White House, or the Maisong Blong, as they call it over there."

"Is that possible? He's some painter, ain't he?"

"He's some and then some."

"Too bad I missed that one."

"Too bad. I don't suppose it would be a good advertisement to say that this Nymph is by the author of the famous shay-doiver now hanging in the French President's lib'ary."

"That's so! Well, I might go as high as five thousand for it. It's an awful wrench, but I might make it."

"It wouldn't do you any good. I'm not sure he'd even let it go for ten thousand. Mr. What-you-may-call-him, the pickle-prince offered him six thousand and Doik just laughed. Pierpont Morgan offered him eight thousand, five hundred, and only got insulted."

Tice was figuring up how many beans it would take to pay for the painting at fifteen cents a can retail, and three thousand, seven hundred and thirty-nine beans in an average can by actual count. The total appalled him. It amounted to a whole sky-full of beans—a Beany-Way across the heavens. But he was a stubborn man once he set hold of an idea.

Nellie walked him round the deck till his tongue was hanging out, and finally she led him up to where Dirk was lying fast asleep. She spoke to Memling several times before he looked up drowsily:

"Well, Doik," said Nellie, "I couldn't convince Mr. Tice that he didn't want that picture. I never saw a man with such detoimination. No wonder he's the biggest



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## *Home Again*

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bean-booster in Nebraska—or wherever it is. He's offering you ten thousand now."

Memling frowned reprovingly: "I don't see how a man can succeed in business who is so extravagant."

"I can afford it, I guess," growled Tice.

Finally, Memling yielded. Tice asked only one thing, a photograph of his cheque to use in the advertisements. He agreed to furnish the camera. When he went to get it, Nellie said:

"We'd better have an extra copy of that snapshot and get it framed. Heaven knows the photograph will be all we'll have to remember it by!"

"I wonder what we'll tell Strubel," said Memling.

"You got time to think up a good story. And it'll have to be a boid to get past Strubie."

## CHAPTER LXV

### HOME AGAIN

THE day after he landed, Memling invited Strubel to the old studio, which he had reopened. The thirty canvases, all but two, were unpacked and aligned along the walls. Strubel stared at them incredulously.

"There they are," said Memling. "They came through the customs as if they had skids on them."

"I see a lot of chromos; and they're all rotten."

"Thank you, Strubie," said Memling, "I was dreading this moment. I was afraid you might admire my work. That would have been a blow to all my hopes. Now I know it's good art—you don't like it."



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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Strubel frowned: "I'm not int'rested in your chokes. I'm int'rested in the pictures that De Ferfank gave you."

"There they are," said Memling, "under the rose. All that is needed now in the application of a bottle or two of my secret restorer."

"Vell, get bissy!" said Strubel, and hurried away.

A few days later he was there again, and now the canvases were aglow with the work of many distinguished artists, each in his own sphere, with his own style. Strubel greeted them with joy, welcomed them to the city. His hands clasped and rolled together.

"T'irty mesterpieces, and feeften per cent saved on the toody," he chortled. "Now, all ve gotta do is sell 'em."

"That should be easy for one of your——" Memling began graciously; then he paused, for Strubel was counting the pictures. He shook his fat forefinger at each of them in turn, then paused, bewildered, and counted again.

"I only make it twenty-eight, Memlink. Count 'em yourselluf!"

"I could never hope to count better than you, Strubel. There are only twenty-eight there."

"But De Ferfank wrote me he gave you t-t-t'irty!" he stammered.

"So he did. One of them is detained in the Salon."

He explained the situation to Strubel who threatened to perish of apoplexy. He recovered eventually enough to demand: "But that leaves one still missing. Vere iss it?"

"I don't know. Ask of the waves that wildly roar."

Strubel, growing frantic, turned to Nellie:

"Vere iss it?"



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## Home Again

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"You can soich me. It's on the ocean somewheres."

"The ocean? The ocean!"

"Yes," Memling spoke with eager haste. "You see, I brought one of the paintings over in my stateroom. Some friends wanted to see it, so I took it up on deck where the light was brighter. One of the passengers carried it to the rail to see better. Just then a big gust of wind came along and blew a dozen steamer-caps overboard. The painting went with them. I was going to leap overboard for it, but I was forcibly restrained."

Strubel went to the divan like an avalanche. When he grew calmer, he became more himself; he stormed:

"I don't believe it! It is a lie!"

Memling smiled: "It's a good one though, isn't it?"

Strubel looked like all the Herods: "You bring me that paintink or I—I put you in chail for life! I sue you for demaches!"

Memling beamed on him patiently: "And will you tell the court the whole story of the transaction, the smuggling and all that? Will you let them confiscate the twenty-nine? Be reasonable, Strubie. The Tonty is gone forever. Make the best of it."

"You—you—oh, you——" Strubel sputtered, his own wrath throttling him, and his brain aching for a terrible enough word.

"I admit all you'd like to say," said Memling, "but I've done my best. I brought you over twenty-nine-thirtieths of my cargo. Circumstances that were more powerful than I have taken the Tonty off the market. But it is all for the best. The Tonty was very bad. It would have done you no credit, Strubie."

Strubel sat glaring. Suddenly his eyes lighted up.

"I vas to pay you zwölf-t'ousant dollars for your



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## *The Amiable Crimes of Dirk Memling*

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share. The Tonty is vort fünfzehn-t'ousant. Give me tree-t'ousant dollars and I call it sqvare."

Memling looked at Nellie: "He's funny, isn't he, Nellie? Wouldn't he be great in musical comedy? Me give you three thousand dollars, Strubie? Hasn't he a wonderful imagination, Nellie?"

"He'll be trying to squeeze blood from a toinip next," said Nellie.

Strubel had to make the best of it. "I deserve it," he said, "for trusting you. My only consolation is I don't pay you your share."

"I shouldn't expect it," said Memling, with a promptness that startled Strubel.

Strubel wandered away like a somnambulist after seeing his twenty-eight masterpieces carried from the studio to his own building. He wondered what Memling's game was. He wondered how Memling planned to keep from starving.

Memling and Nellie danced a turkey-trot of triumph after he had gone. They had robbed a thief, spoiled the spoiler and they had Mr. Tice's big cheque in the bank.

The bell rang. A messenger boy brought a letter from a New York hotel. Memling signed the book, tipped the boy and opened the letter. He read, gulped, sighed, handed the letter mutely to Nellie. It was from Tice:

DEAR MR. MEMLING: On consulting with my partner, who met me at the pier, I find that he is unwilling to O. K. my purchase of your painting. Have, therefore, been compelled to telegraph to Saint Paul to stop payment on the check. Am sending the painting to you this afternoon, charges prepaid.

Regretting any inconvenience this may have caused you,  
Yours truly, J. G. TICE.



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## *Home Again*

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Nellie and Memling looked at each other. Their looks were a funeral march.

"The——" Nellie began.

"Don't waste breath on him," said Memling.

"But can't you sue him or sumpum?"

"Like Strubie, the further I can keep from the courthouse, the comfortabler I'll be."

"Take the picture to Strubel and tell him you just found it."

"And rub out the sun-burnt nymph?"

"Oh, no! you couldn't do that. But we haven't got a cent."

"But we have each other. And we've had our trip to Paris. And I've learned what a great painter I am."

"But we haven't got a cent."

"Don't worry, Satan finds some mischief still——"

(1)

THE END



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